

# *COMING HOME*

*Death and Identity In  
Contemporary Australian Society*

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Sub-Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
degree of Master of Arts (Australian Studies)

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

April 1998

I declare that this thesis is my own work and all sources used have been acknowledged.

*S. M. Elenny*





*FOR HAMISH*  
*My inspiration in all things.*

*COMING HOME*

*To my home, my working day home  
To the street and light of the day  
To my home, to my own people there,  
where happiness has welcomed their brother another  
among the quiet of the street  
I am the light and love  
Behind my home, I am the light of that world  
but I am the light of the world, I am the light.*

*As I go, I go to the light of my home  
And you, the light of the world, will love me and be with me,  
and your family, and be with your home.  
When you stand, it was I, even my own family, who helped you and called you,  
both of you, and who were the light of your family.  
I am the light of the world,  
and you, the light of the world.*

*And I am the light of the world,  
and you, the light of the world, will love me  
Suppose I had been a mother and a son, I would have been the light of the world  
to be the light of the world, in that light.  
The light of the world is this  
If my husband was dead, there might be another,  
and a son by another man if I had had my children.  
But my mother and father were gone,  
I could never have had a new brother.*

*Original: 1900/1901*

# COMING HOME

*To my tomb, my wedding, my home  
the eternal vigil of the grave:  
I am going to my own people there,  
where Persephone has welcomed their greater number  
among the spirits of the dead.  
I am the last and least.  
Before my time, I am descending to that world;  
but I am returning home as well, from an exile.*

*As I go, I nurse the hope in my heart  
that you, Father and Mother, will love me and be with me,  
and you brother, will let me see your face.  
When you died, it was I, with my own hands, who bathed you and tidied you,  
both of you, and who gave offerings at your graveside.  
Polyneices, I buried you too.  
And today, this is my reward.*

*But I was right to honour you,  
and men who understand will agree.  
Suppose I had been a mother and a widow. I would have taken this burden on  
or defied the nation, in that case.  
The principle I followed is this:  
If my husband had died, there might be another,  
and a son by another man if I had lost my children.  
But my mother and father were gone.  
I could never have had a new brother.*

*Antigone, Sophocles.*

# CONTENTS

	Page Number
INTRODUCTION	vi
PART 1: IDENTITY	1
The Journey	2
CHAPTER 1:1 The Australian Myth	5
CHAPTER 1:2 The Fantasy Of Nationalism	20
PART 2: DEATH	35
The Homecoming	36
CHAPTER 2:1 The Modern Death	38
The Cemetery	57
CHAPTER 2:2 Inscribing The Land	61
CONCLUSION	75
BIBLIOGRAPHY	78



# INTRODUCTION

## *Acknowledgments*

I have many people to thank for support and encouragement during the planning and writing of this paper. I am indebted to several people who remain nameless, including members of my family, for allowing me to intrude on painful and personal topics. I would particularly like to thank Jennifer Rutherford who has inspired the approach to this paper and generously contributed so many ideas and advice. I would also like to thank Jane Moffat and Amber Varvel for their work in editing this paper. Most of all, I would like to thank three people who have had the difficult task of tolerating my desire for knowledge and understanding; my mother, my grandmother and Steve, without whose support, both emotional and financial, this would never have been finished.

# INTRODUCTION

As we race towards the end of the twentieth century, Australian society appears a plural society sustaining a proliferation of histories and widely disparate national identities. Within this proliferation there is one view of history and its associated national identity which continues to carry remarkable force, despite the rumours of its disappearance from the cultural terrain. The history which I refer to is what can be thought of as a mythical white Australian history, a discourse resting on a European colonialist understanding of Australia's conception, an understanding of the landscape as an "empty space" prior to colonisation.<sup>1</sup> This "empty space" came to be filled with systems of meaning external to the land that became Australia and its people. The identity which has been constructed to negotiate the land, and a white European understanding of it, is that of the 'bushman'.

The mythos of the 'bushman' derives from an initial stage of society in Australia, a stage when the colony was an outpost of England, when it stood as an intruder in what was perceived as an ancient, timeless land. This society clung to the edges of the continent, gazing in towards the "'dead heart', once perhaps fertile but now the harshest of environments".<sup>2</sup> It was imagination which filled the interior. The newcomers knew little about the continent, neither its size, shape, nor climate, believing that it could be tamed and possessed. Pastoralism was seized as the means to conquer the landscape. Within a hundred years of colonisation, pastoralists had encircled Australia, priding themselves on "transforming the wilderness into a great pastoral empire, a tempting source of gold, and a working man's paradise sustaining the thriving cities of Melbourne and Sydney".<sup>3</sup> The landscapes created by this "pastoral empire" became accepted as 'typically Australian', although most

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<sup>1</sup> Gibson, R. 1992, *South of The West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, p.9. [hereafter *South of the West*].

<sup>2</sup> Bolton, G. 1992, *Spoils and Spoilers: A History of Australians Shaping Their Environment*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p.25. [hereafter *Spoils and Spoilers*].

<sup>3</sup> Bolton, G. 1992, *Spoils and Spoilers*, p.4.

Australians only experienced life in towns and suburbs. Furthermore, the nature of the continent and the drive to conquer the land promoted large pastoral properties which provided opportunities for many stockmen or casual hands. It was an environment which brought into being an overwhelmingly masculine, rural population. The nature of the work meant that life was semi-nomadic, the loneliness and hardships of bush life produced the ethos of 'mateship' as the means to guard against the hazards of the bush. This relationship between white Australian men required the traits of loyalty, altruism, commitment, toughness, adaptability, and a desire for the 'freedom' of outback life. In this way, "Australians came to be viewed by newcomers as typically men of the outback".<sup>4</sup> This perception established an ethos which promoted mateship, physical prowess and recklessness, and an understanding across the land that it was in the bush that the 'real' Australian could be found.

White Australian identity is intrinsically tied to emotional and literal ideas of the land. The white history of Australia began with a brutal British penal colony. The European-based perception was of a vast and inhospitable land which defied a sense of belonging for the colonists. Examining the notion of Australia as inhospitable and the practices undertaken by the colonising Europeans to inscribe the land with their own meaning we start to gain a sense of the myths surrounding a white Australian identity. Furthermore, we begin to see the reasons that lie behind the remaining, uneasy relationship with the body of land itself. The traditional figure of the 'bushman' continues to be called on in critical, uneasy moments to mediate a white Australian understanding of the landscape and national identity. Australia has a long history of literary interpretations of the landscape and its nation. Many of these interpretations have become mythical, penetrating "the 'collective consciousness' through imaginative interpretations by modern writers".<sup>5</sup> It is a process which

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<sup>4</sup> Hodges, E. 1982, "The Bushman Legend", in *Intruders In The Bush: The Australian Quest For Identity*, ed J. Carroll, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, p.7. [hereafter "The Bushman Legend"].

<sup>5</sup> Gibson, R, 1984, *The Diminishing Paradise: Changing Literary Perceptions of Australia*, Sirius: Angus & Robertson, Sydney, p.xiii. [hereafter *The Diminishing Paradise*].

articulates the struggles of a new society, alienated from its environment, attempting to construct a nation, to define the country and the land in meaningful, symbolic terms.<sup>6</sup> In this paper I aim to demonstrate that this figure of the 'bushman' does not remain a historically located discourse. In contemporary Australian society this figure continues to prevail and to dominate the articulation of national identity. The 'bushman' remains a fluid character, organising Australian experience, not only at an intimate and personal level, but in critical, public moments when the Australian nation requires an identity.

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This thesis analyses the death of a single Australian, Hamish Wallace, and it is through the story of his accident, his death and final resting place that the nature of Australian fantasies of the land are brought to the fore. The approach which I have taken in investigating this story is, in itself, a transgression. In relating a story, the knowing subject is traditionally seen as the third term, imposing a reading on the story, imparting it as 'truth'. The nature of Hamish Wallace's story, however, leaves me in a position in which I cannot escape the contradictions and effects of my own need to produce a reading, an analysis, an account of what happened. My own identification with this story remains explicit. Hamish Wallace was my brother. Despite recognising the transgression this action entails, I propose to analyse this incident in order to reflect on how national identity and its fantasies continues to assert its presence in intimate ways even in the stories that we tell. The narrative enables an examination of the systems of meaning that inform our experience of Australian society and social relations within it. It is also an opportunity to examine how my own complicity in this story demonstrates the structures of meaning at work within Australian society and the way in which, at a most intimate point of life, I was enmeshed in the systems of meaning which surround and determine the concept of a national identity.

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<sup>6</sup> Gibson, R. 1984, *The Diminishing Paradise*, pp.xii-xvi.



Part One examines the experience of Hamish Wallace's accident and the way particular aspects of the accident have offered the means to examine ideas about how Australia has been constructed through systems of signification and the way meaning is organised and reproduced in society. The accident is an important starting point in the exploration of how identity is defined and the way in which the fantasy of Australian death functions to uphold dominant perceptions of the Australian landscape, identity and an understanding of nationalism.

Part Two evaluates perceptions of death within Australian culture. In particular, this section approaches the way Hamish Wallace's return to the Forbes Cemetery for burial, functions as a means of further establishing a place of belonging. This action emphasises the way death, an inevitable occurrence, has become a means of taking possession of the landscape and of reinforcing the myths of Australian identity. Through an examination of this individual's family and their relationship with the Forbes Cemetery, an insight into how structures of meaning are maintained within Australian society can be gained. Of interest is the way in which the myth of national identity is perpetuated through our most intimate and important rituals, continuing to maintain not only discourses surrounding death, but those of a whole community and their relation to land ownership. In this way, this paper explores the cultural fantasies about 'home' and 'identity' and the way these concepts are established and perpetuated through discourse and ritual practices. Finally, through this understanding of the structure of death within white Australian society, we can approach the way the discursive establishment of 'place' functions as a means of denying the indigenous population their own identity, and the place of their own stories, histories and deaths in contemporary Australia.

In a sense it is a story which has chosen itself. The intimate, momentous event of Hamish Wallace's death has perpetuated a new understanding of Australian society. It has widened my own experience of the phenomenon of grief and its relation to

‘place’, particularly the cemetery as a place of personal expression and significance. As Peter Read suggests, “the last part of bonding with the land. . . is the creation of special, intimate or sacred sites”.<sup>7</sup> This intimate, special site offers a remarkable opportunity to understand how Hamish’s accident and burial site has become the symbol of Australian life and the endeavour to inscribe the land.

<sup>7</sup> Read, P. 1996, *Returning To Nothing: The Meaning of Lost Places*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, p.8. [hereafter *Returning to Nothing*].

## *PART 1*

# *IDENTITY*

*No church-bell rings them from the track,  
No pulpit lights their blindness-  
'Tis hardship, drought and homelessness,  
That teach those Bushmen kindness:  
The mateship born of barren lands,  
Of toil and thirst and danger-  
The camp-fare for the stranger set,  
The first place to a stranger.*

*And though he may be brown or black,  
Or wrong man there or right man,  
The mate that's honest to his mates,  
They call that man a "white man"!  
They tramp in mateship side by side-  
The protestant and "roman"-  
They call no biped lord or "sir",  
And touch their hats to no man!*

*They turn their faces to the west,  
And leave the world behind them-  
(Their drought-dried graves are seldom green,  
Where even mates can find them).  
They know too little of the world,  
To rise to wealth or greatness:  
But in this book of mine I pay,  
My tribute to their straightness.*

*The Shearers, Henry Lawson*

# THE JOURNEY

*On Saturday, October 3, 1993, Hamish Wallace and Scott Grezl flew out of Bankstown airport in a single-engine Socata Trinidad aircraft, bound for a weekend in Forbes, NSW. Scott, the pilot, and Hamish, his friend, had been planning the weekend for some time. Scott had recently acquired his unrestricted licence, giving the boys the opportunity to visit their respective families in Forbes. By all accounts they were in high spirits as they prepared for their trip.*

*They flew out of Bankstown at approximately 8.30am. It was an unusual day. There was broken cloud over Sydney but the Blue Mountains were shrouded in a foreboding, impenetrable blanket. Scott did not have an instrument rating and therefore had to fly below the cloud. Despite warnings from ground crew at Bankstown that it was impossible to get through the mountains because of the weather, the boys decided they would 'have a go'. Investigators now believe that Scott felt he could track south to where the mountains are lower. Following the Kowmung River and staying beneath the cloud, they would come out near Oberon on the western side of the mountains. That was the plan. It was also illegal. To pull it off, the plane would have to stay below the cloud which would mean flying at an altitude lower than the regulation 200 feet. Nonetheless, they flew.*

*Perhaps in their youthful impetuosity they did not register the danger. The flight may well have been uneventful until they reached the junction where Christy's Creek turns to the west from the Kowmung. At this tree-skimming height the tributary seems the wider of the two and therefore the continuation of the Kowmung. It was their fatal mistake. As they shot up Wheengee Whungee Creek, which Christy's becomes, there was dark cloud overhead, the trees just below. The Boyd Range was hidden in the mist directly ahead. The gap got tighter and tighter until there was no room for this speedy little aircraft to turn around. Suddenly the gap wasn't there at all. The Boyd Range rose at an impossible angle of 45 degrees in front of them; they couldn't see it. They probably had no idea until the trees started rushing at them. At such an angle the plane would have*

*lost speed, unable to climb, and stalled. They skimmed a tree, clipped another. The plane was on fire as they ploughed through the thin timbers and smashed into the ground. They were burnt but miraculously alive and so they scrambled from the plane. It was 20 minutes after takeoff. They were still close to 'civilisation', or so it would seem. As they surveyed the wreckage they must have thought they were the luckiest people on earth. Sometime soon they would have changed their minds about that.*

*This description of the flight and the remainder of this story is speculation. As a result of the failure to lodge a flight plan, no emergency beacon, and a questionable investigation, the families have been left with nothing but questions. What happened? How long did they survive? What did they die of? Why couldn't we find them? These questions, however, did not surface - for a while at least. The Civil Aviation Authority galvanised into action. The biggest aerial search in Australia's history began, with no result. After three days and almost \$1,000,000 spent, the search was abandoned. So the families took over. While it is difficult to convey the chaotic thoughts of the time, one thing remained clear...we were going to find that plane. Why? Hamish Wallace was my brother.*

*There is one day which I keep returning to; one that I am only now beginning to question. We were flying in a helicopter through the Kanangra Boyd National Park, following ravines and searching endlessly for the wreckage of the plane. It is impossible to express the difficulty of this task, and the vastness of the country in which we live. We did not find it, and were returning home alone, again. It was Day 10 and we were losing hope. The struggle to commit emotionally to another day of searching, to coming home without him on yet another day was getting more difficult to face.*

*It was close to sunset and the light cast the ravines into bottomless pools of shadow. Mist curled through the distant green valleys, the western slopes of the hills and cliff-faces bathed to a golden ochre by the disappearing sun. It was, without exception, the most beautiful and most terrible landscape I had ever witnessed. I felt profoundly that this was Australia; my country. And for the first*

*time I understood it as a land of struggle, a land of endless contradiction; for we were broken-hearted in the face of such awesome splendour. In the face of the terrible power of that landscape and our futile struggle to control it, I was left with the understanding that 'the bush' had beaten us. It had sent a reminder of the futility of our struggle for existence. The moment will never pass from my memory. I left him there in the mountains that day; as part of the terrible, breath-taking beauty of the bush, and went home alone.*

*They were found twenty three days after their fateful flight; some one hundred metres apart in a creek bed, three kilometres from the crash site. Somehow, despite their injuries they had crawled or staggered the distance in an attempt to reach safety. They never made it. The chaos of the day they were found is hard to recall, and strangely has not remained in my memory with the clarity of the day in the helicopter. The families of the two boys congregated at the makeshift police headquarters in Kanangra; a shocked, motionless focal point for the surrounding chaos. The media went berserk. The air was filled with helicopters; the sound of the rotors a chilling thud in my chest. We gained a sense of what Vietnam Veterans experience when they hear that sound. An interesting aspect, for it was war. But against what? The bush, of course.<sup>1</sup>*

*On October 26, the day the bodies were found, Derryn Hinch gave a tribute to Scott and Hamish's "Aussie guts and courage". He claimed he was impressed by their "individual stamina and heroism" and how they "managed to stick together" like 'mates'. He told a captive nation that "their final hours were heroic; their efforts evoke memories and names like Burke and Wills and Mawson of the Antarctic".<sup>2</sup> The reference stood out in my mind. What did this tragedy have to do with Australian explorers? The dawning of understanding was slow but enlightening. Did I truly believe that the bush had beaten us? My own complicity in the restatement of the myth of the 'Australian Legend' was suddenly very clear.*

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<sup>1</sup> The narrative of these events is drawn from personal experience.

<sup>2</sup> Hinch, D. "Tribute to Scott Grezl and Hamish Wallace", Broadcast on *Hinch*, Channel Seven television, October 26, 1993.



## *Chapter 1:1*

# *THE AUSTRALIAN MYTH*

It has been claimed many times that there is a need to re-examine Australia's past in the search for a national identity. Despite countless examinations of what being Australian really means, not only through this century but reaching back to colonisation, it is often argued that Australian society is no closer to articulating a coherent national identity. Attempts to discover and characterise an Australian national identity by scholars and historians have remained unsuccessful; thwarted by the endless contradictions that are part of Australian culture.

Prior to the latter half of the twentieth century, an understanding of Australia's history since colonisation rested heavily on two periods in time: the 1850s and 1890s. These decades projected a national ethos of society and the individual within that society. The national character which began to develop was that of the 'bushman'. This figure embodied everything it meant to be Australian; Anglo-Celtic in descent; the all-round 'good bloke' struggling against the forces of nature in the Australian bush; facing adversity with a stoical joke. Russell Ward provides the most celebrated and criticised account of this figure. The famous description provides a stereotyped image of the 'bushman':

"... a practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry any appearance of affectation in others. He is a great improviser, ever willing to have a go at anything, but willing too to be content with a task done in a way that is near enough. Though capable of great exertion in an emergency, he normally feels no impulse to work hard without good cause. He swears hard and consistently, gambles heavily and often, and drinks deeply on occasion . . . he is usually taciturn rather than talkative, . . . [he is] sceptical about the value of religion and of intellectual and cultural pursuits generally. He believes that Jack is not only as good as his master but, at least in principle, probably a good deal better, and so he is a great 'knocker' of eminent people unless, as in the case of his sporting heroes,

they are distinguished by physical prowess. He . . . hates officiousness and authority, especially when these qualities are embodied in military officers and policemen. Yet he is very hospitable and, above all, will stick to his mates through thick and thin, even if he thinks they may be in the wrong.<sup>1</sup>

This image of the ‘bushman’ echoes through Australian culture, according to Ward, a result of the surge of nationalist sentiment during the 1890s. Using this figure as the basis for a national ideal, Ward argued the image “gave strength and cohesion to the dominant but disparate social forces at work in Australian society during this period”.<sup>2</sup> Eleanor Hodges suggests that this emergence of the bushman as a myth was a result of the “rapid growth of the trade union movement, and the discovery of the bush by literary men”.<sup>3</sup> Ward argues that the distinctively Australian ideals which he attributed to the ‘Australian Legend’ were developed in rural Australia, and can be widely attributed to the pastoral workers of last century. It has been argued that it is through an examination of historical writings, contemporary literature and folk stories that this image of the ‘real’ Australian was transported to Australian society as a whole. Gibson suggests that the 1890s are viewed as a

formative era of Australian nationalism and political maturity,. . . [a] period in which the issues which led to federation in 1901 were crystallised and the nation “found its voice”, with the publication of major works by such important figures as Henry Lawson, A. B. “Banjo” Paterson, “Price Warung” and the Bulletin writers.<sup>4</sup>

The notion that it was in the ‘bush’ that the ‘real’ Australian could be found pervades poetry written by these authors. A. B. Paterson’s images of men of the bush have been immortalised through poems such as ‘The Man From Snowy River’ and ‘On Kiley’s Run’:

<sup>1</sup> Ward, R. 1958, *The Australian Legend*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, p.1-2. [hereafter *The Australian Legend*].

<sup>2</sup> Hodges, E. 1982, “The Bushman Legend”, pp.11-12. Hodges goes on to evaluate the relationship of the legend of the bushman to the foundation of Australia as a penal colony and the way in which the bush ethos evolved in the ‘outback’ and in conflict with the British authorities.

<sup>3</sup> Hodges, E. 1982, “The Bushman Legend”, p.12.

<sup>4</sup> Gibson, R. 1984, *The Diminishing Paradise*, p.196.





environment.<sup>9</sup> In 'The Shearers', he immortalises the popular image of the bushman, one that Ward would later describe as the 'Australian Legend'. Arguably this image of the 'real' Australian was articulated for Australian society through a wave of republicanism which entered politics in the 1880s and 1890s. Two Sydney publications available in these decades, the *Bulletin* and the *Republican*, founded the writings on the bushman myth. Nostalgia and an idealised understanding of the outback was common. Hirst suggests that "the creation of the pioneer legend can be explained by the growth of nationalism in the 1880s and 1890s and the need to find new national heroes and symbols".<sup>10</sup> He argues that as a result of a favourable political climate, the *Bulletin* advocated a popular image of the bushman as the image of the new Australian. It was an attempt to throw off the stigma of the founding of the country as a penal colony. Moreover, it was an opportunity to create a fictitious past that was more appealing to society.<sup>11</sup>

This process of defining and promoting a 'real' Australian meant that by the time of Federation, and certainly by the 1930's 'discovery' of the 1890s, the myth of the bushman was "firmly enshrined in both the literary and popular imagination as the culture-hero upon whose characteristics many Australians tended - consciously or unconsciously - to model their attitudes to life".<sup>12</sup> The literary heritage offered to Australian society is regularly acknowledged. It remains important to this story for the reasons which are suggested by Ross Gibson:

Because it entailed Australia's earliest means of identifying itself it would figure largely in the country's system of myth. The way that Australians . . . regarded themselves would always be influenced to some extent by the way the country was first interpreted.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See examples of Henry Lawson's literature such as *The Bush Undertaker*, *The Union Buries Its Dead* and "Water Them Geraniums" in Kiernan, B. (ed.) 1976, *Henry Lawson*, University of Queensland Press, Queensland.

<sup>10</sup> Hirst, J.B. 1982, "The Pioneer Legend", in *Intruders In The Bush: The Australian Quest For Identity*, ed. J. Carroll, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, p.29. [hereafter "The Pioneer Legend"].

<sup>11</sup> Hirst, J.B. 1982, "The Pioneer Legend", pp.15-37.

<sup>12</sup> Hodges, E. 1982, "The Bushman Legend", p.12.

<sup>13</sup> Gibson, R. 1984, *The Diminishing Paradise*, p.xiii.

In the same way, the influence of the 'bushman', emphasising the notion of the rural experience in providing a national spirit, has continued since the 1950s in many areas of popular culture such as contemporary literature, art, and the film industry. Not only does the bushman still appear, perceptions of the landscape as hostile still continue. Patrick White writes of the hardships of outback Australia and exploring in *Voss*, creating a landscape "hostile to anything in the nature of planned development".<sup>14</sup> The landscape brought to the reader is vast, inhospitable and dangerous. "It was easy in that landscape to encourage thoughts of death".<sup>15</sup> The inhabitants of that landscape are either resourceful and driven to beat nature, like Voss himself, or objects of embarrassment like Topp, "a small, white, worried man with small, moist, white hands, shameful in that country of dry, yellow calluses. All he made was music, for which he was continually apologising, and hoping he might not be called upon to explain what useful purpose his passion served".<sup>16</sup> Kenneth Slessor writes of country life in "The Country Ride", offering a romanticised vision of small country towns. "Country wives with bare and earth-burnt knees, And boys with beer, and smiles from balconies. . ."<sup>17</sup> Ann Curthoys directs attention to this representation and the way it has been sustained in the Australian film industry through the 1970s and into the 1990s. Films such as *Sunday Too Far Away*, *A Town Like Alice*, and *Crocodile Dundee* demonstrate the "enduring popularity of this image of a distinctly Australian type".<sup>18</sup> While Curthoys argues much has changed since the 1950s, the pervasiveness of this ideal is still clear. Films such as those mentioned above, along with *Gallipoli*, *The Man From Snowy River*, and *Mr Reliable* continue to offer an available image to Australians. In *Gallipoli* we are

<sup>14</sup> White, P. 1957, *Voss*, Penguin Books, London, p.62. [hereafter *Voss*]. For a further evaluation of Patrick White's use of Australian ideals see Hooton, J. 1994, "Laurie and Noeline and Sylvania Waters" in *The Abundant Culture: Meaning and Significance in Everyday Australia*, eds. D. Headon, J. Hooton, & D. Horne, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

<sup>15</sup> White, P. 1957, *Voss*, p.243.

<sup>16</sup> White, P. 1957, *Voss*, p.30.

<sup>17</sup> Slessor, K. 1944, "The Country Ride", in *Kenneth Slessor: Selected Poems*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, p.88.

<sup>18</sup> Curthoys, A. 1997, "History and Identity", p.30.

shown images of mateship and loyalty as qualities singular to the Australian male. *The Man From Snowy River*; the adaptation of A.B. Paterson's poem, echoed the sentiments of a deeply ingrained image of the 'Australian Legend', or as Peter Read describes: an "image of mountain men and women, complete with dogs, Akubra hat, Drizabone riding coat and elastic-sided boots, . . . as familiar an icon to most Australians as when Banjo Paterson wrote [it]".<sup>19</sup> *Mr Reliable* brought viewers the story of Wally Mellish, who held the NSW police at bay during a farcical siege and became a folk hero in the process. A carnival atmosphere ensued around him, and he was elevated to Ned Kelly-like status. The movie portrayed an easy-going Australian, naive but not stupid, innocent and vulnerable to the evil of the authorities. He was received with the affection reserved for folk-heroes such as the bushrangers of a past century. These examples demonstrate the pervasive nature of the ideals surrounding the 'bushman' and the wide audience they receive through different mediums. In this way, popular culture continues to offer audiences an available national identity based on the 'Australian Legend'.

The last thirty years of this century have seen attempts at the reinterpretation and re-evaluation of canonised Australian history. This largely began in the early 1970s with questions of racism by new left writers such as Humphrey McQueen. He re-examined the idealised Australian bush experience, emphasising the exclusion of the indigenous peoples and other minority groups who played an important role in the development of the Australian outback. McQueen argues that "racism is the most important single component of Australian nationalism".<sup>20</sup> Pointing to Ward's outline of 'The Australian Legend', he suggests that while Ward suggests that racism is of marginal importance, it is actually the "linchpin of his precious nationalism". An upsurgeance of feminism in Australian history saw critics such as Miriam Dixson argue that Ward's sketch of the bushman "centres around a special style of masculinity. It is a style that reeks of womanlessness: 'group solidarity' should read

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<sup>19</sup> Read, P. 1996, *Returning To Nothing*, p.56.

<sup>20</sup> McQueen, H. 1970, *A New Britannia?* Penguin, Ringwood, p.42.

‘male group solidarity’; ‘working bushman’ is accurate . . . this ethos sprang mainly from *male* convict, working-class, Irish and native-born Australian sources”.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Marilyn Lake interpreted the ‘Australian Legend’ as the image of a “masculine and homo-social world that was Australia”.<sup>22</sup> In direct conflict with these views, Rosemary Foxton has examined the location of women within the Australian landscape, arguing that the European woman was not excluded as an other against which identity is formed. Foxton gives examples of a landscape incorporating elements which fostered a “sympathetic relationship between the colonist and the landscape that is colonised”.<sup>23</sup> She argues that despite consistent repetitions of prevailing masculine perceptions of the Australian landscape, “discourses upon the European experience of Australian landscape have not reached a consensus”.<sup>24</sup> She rejects Lake’s stance, suggesting that women were given the opportunity to articulate other identities for themselves. From another approach, following the interest in racial issues by new left writers and the Mabo debate, the importance of Aboriginal history was evaluated further in the 1980s.<sup>25</sup> Curthoys writes that these events offered the opportunity for “an alternative historical understanding emphasising the impossibility of justifying invasion in [nineteenth-century] or on any terms”.<sup>26</sup> These new approaches brought with them new ways of evaluating a previously constituted Australian identity. The ‘Australian Legend’ described by Ward was not only called into question, but attacked as not being part of the Australian identity at any time.

<sup>21</sup> Dixon, M. 1976, *The Real Matilda: Woman and Identity in Australia 1788 to 1975*, Penguin, Melbourne, p.24. Dixon emphasises Ward’s outline of the values of the ‘real’ Australian by explicitly stating what can be argued to imply in *The Australian Legend*.

<sup>22</sup> Lake, M. 1997, “Feminists Creating Citizens”, in *Creating Australia: Changing Australian History*, eds. W. Hudson, & G. Bolton, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p.96. For a further analysis of this approach to the fashioning of gender identities in Australian history see Damousi, J. & Lake, M (eds.) 1995, *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne.

<sup>23</sup> Foxton, R. 1994, “Reading Australian Landscapes of Faith and Doubt in the Nineteenth Century”, in *Identifying Australia in Postmodern Times*, ed. L. Dobrez, Bibliotech ANU, Canberra, p.120. [hereafter “Reading Australian Landscapes”].

<sup>24</sup> Foxton, R. 1994, “Reading Australian Landscapes”, p.116.

<sup>25</sup> In 1992 Koiki Mabo gained positive recognition of enduring native title by the High Court of Australia. The history-making legislation was passed on 22 December 1992 recognising Native Title and establishing a degree of credibility on the importance of Aboriginal human rights.

By evaluating these new approaches to Australian history, contemporary writers have produced a conflicting body of arguments about and definitions of the Australian identity. Paul Carter suggests that Australian identity is a construct based on migration, tied solely to the movement of people, not existing prior to arrival, a suggestion resting on notions of mimicry.<sup>27</sup> Livio Dobrez claims that the phenomenon of identity is grounded in ‘real historical events’. He suggests that “identity emerges from the process of appropriation of the country .. in nationalist terms”.<sup>28</sup> The problem that this approach reveals is whether minority groups who have remained outside the “appropriation of the country” and remain unable to lay claim to ‘nationalist’ ideals then have no part in the national identity. David Goodman argues that

severed from the ‘national identity’ of which he was once seen as the embodiment, the bushman stands revealed as a still interesting but highly specific figure - an idealogue of masculinism, a figment of the fretted urban imagination, a generic inhabitant of the imperial frontier, an object of desire for anxious racial theorists.<sup>29</sup>

What Goodman overlooks when he describes the bushman in this way is whether he remains “highly specific”. More recently, Wayne Hudson and Geoffrey Bolton have emphasised a need for an understanding of the multiple identities available to

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<sup>26</sup> Curthoys, A. 1982, “History and Identity”, p.32.

<sup>27</sup> Carter, P. 1994, “Baroque Identities: Migration and Mimicry”, in *Identifying Australia in Postmodern Times*, ed. L. Dobrez, Bibliotech ANU, Canberra, pp.1-13. An in-depth evaluation of post-colonial theory is beyond the scope of this paper. On poststructuralism, postcolonial criticism, and the critique of the West see Bhabha, H.K. 1994, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse”, in *The Location Of Culture*, Bhabha, H.K. Routledge, New York, pp.85-93. Also Young, R. 1990, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, Routledge, London, and the writings of the subaltern group: Guha, R. (ed) 1981-89, *Subaltern Studies, I-VI*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, Guha, R. 1983, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, Chatterjee, P. 1986, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial world: A Derivative Discourse?* Zed Books, London, and Chakrabarty, D. 1989, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal 1890-1940*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

<sup>28</sup> Dobrez, L. 1994, “Introduction”, in *Identifying Australia in Postmodern Times*, Bibliotech ANU, Canberra, p.xii.

<sup>29</sup> Goodman, D. 1994, “Australian Identity, Postmodernism and History” in *Identifying Australia in Postmodern Times*, ed. L. Dobrez, Bibliotech ANU, Canberra, p.49. [hereafter “Australian Identity, Postmodernism and History”].



Australians since colonisation, arguing that “at the end of the twentieth century, neither realism nor a theoretically driven constructivist approach is adequate as a way of understanding Australia”.<sup>30</sup> By drawing attention to the multiple identities available within the conglomerate of people that is the Australian nation, Hudson and Bolton suggest there is a new way to evaluate identity by accepting the originality of the individual within society. They suggest that British influences were never as ‘monolithic’ as previous historians have argued, pointing out the evidence of multiculturalism reaching back much further than the 1980s. Despite the suggestion that the Australian individual “should not be reduced to their myths” but that Australians “need to recognise their own creativity and originality”, these writers fail to offer a means of “shrugging off nation-wide generalisations” in order to achieve a national identity determined in this way.<sup>31</sup> It is these “nation-wide generalisations” which this paper is concerned with, and the extent to which they influence the individual in society.

In *Inventing Australia*, Richard White argues that “there is no ‘real’ Australia waiting to be uncovered”.<sup>32</sup> Denying the existence of an essential identity, he suggests that reality consists solely of constructs. By approaching the idea of the Australian nation as a European construct, White suggests that “the idealised nation is in many ways an invention, an artificial construction, rather than an expression of an underlying essence that all members of a particular nation share”.<sup>33</sup> In an article in 1997, however, White revisits his original evaluation, restating his position that “some things are more constructs than others”.<sup>34</sup> He points out that he should have made the distinction in his earlier work “between the invented quality of ideas about

<sup>30</sup> Hudson, W & Bolton, G. 1997, “Creating Australia”, in *Creating Australia: Changing Australian History*, eds. W. Hudson & G. Bolton, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p.2.[hereafter “Creating Australia”].

<sup>31</sup> Hudson, W. & Bolton, G. 1997, “Creating Australia”, pp.2-6.

<sup>32</sup> White, R. 1981, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

<sup>33</sup> White, R. 1997, “Inventing Australia Revisited”, in *Creating Australia: Changing Australian History*, eds. W. Hudson & G. Bolton, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p.15. [hereafter “Inventing Australia Revisited”].

<sup>34</sup> White, R. 1997, “Inventing Australia Revisited”, p.15.

Australia and the 'reality' of other aspects of life in Australia". In a new position White argues that

if the idea of 'Australia' is an invention, an active and creative process rather than something that has a prior existence and simply needs to be discovered, then it follows that it will be invented and embroidered in different ways by different people for different reasons. This could be taken to mean that there is no single Australian identity but only multiple identities.<sup>35</sup>

In retrospect, White suggests that in *Inventing Australia*, he "merely" drew attention to one of the dominant identities competing for supremacy, one that was only dominant at a specific time, certainly a powerful tradition but one that does not emerge out of the experience of everyday life, which he calls 'reality'.<sup>36</sup>

The conflicting definitions of identity employed by these writers emphasise the difficulty of articulating a national identity. This paper does not suggest that the 'Australian Legend' accounts for Australia's whole cultural experience, nor does it suggest that a singular national identity defines the cultural terrain. It does suggest, however, that the "monolithic" ideal of the 'bushman', and its associated fantasies, has greater influence in contemporary Australian society than most writers and historians like to admit. This argument draws on recent theories of language, the self, and desire, and the way in which forms of social control function to maintain structures of knowledge and power within the Australian nation. For example, Jacques Lacan suggests that a human subject does not exist without language, even though the subject cannot be reduced to language. He "insists we are all immersed in everyday language and cannot get out of it. . . We all have to represent ourselves in language".<sup>37</sup> It is the relationship with signifiers and signified which he evaluates, arguing that each word is only definable and understandable in terms of other words.

<sup>35</sup> White, R. 1997, "Inventing Australia Revisited", p.17.

<sup>36</sup> White, R. 1997, "Inventing Australia Revisited", pp.19-21.

<sup>37</sup> Sarup, M. 1993, *An Introductory Guide To Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, 2nd edition, Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York, p.10. [hereafter *Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*].



“There is no natural link between signifier and signified”.<sup>38</sup> In this way, Lacan argues that the unconscious is a hidden structure which resembles that of language. “Knowledge of the world, of others and of self is determined by language. Language is the precondition for the act of becoming aware of oneself as a distinct identity”.<sup>39</sup> Language also structures relations to society, a culture, and the prohibitions and laws governing that society. Therefore, the subject exists within a complex linguistic structure which determines subjectivity and place in society.

Drawing on Lacan, Kay Schaffer offers an interpretation of Australian cultural traditions which emphasises the cultural constructions inherent to the idea of Australia as a ‘nation’. Schaffer’s exploration of Australian history suggests that culture comes to us through codes of meaning embedded in language and other forms of representation. She argues that Australian culture has long measured itself against the bush as a central image, suggesting that we have been exposed to these meanings so often they have become an ideal. She draws our attention to various writers who reveal these familiar notions with examples such as

the male-as-norm and the land-as-other; the bush as central and city as peripheral to self-definition; and the personification of the bush as the heart, the Interior - a mysterious presence which calls to men for the purposes of exploration and discovery but is also a monstrous place in which men may either perish or be absorbed.<sup>40</sup>

When considered in this way, these notions arguably define the ‘real’ Australian, a national type which does not exist but which is given status and value within society.<sup>41</sup> Despite Foxton’s suggestion that the European woman was given the opportunity to articulate an identity for themselves, and Goodman’s argument that

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<sup>38</sup> Sarup, M. 1993, *Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, p.10.

<sup>39</sup> Sarup, M. 1993, *Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, p.8.

<sup>40</sup> Schaffer, K. 1988, *Women and The Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p.52. [hereafter *Women and The Bush*].

<sup>41</sup> Schaffer, K. 1988, *Women and The Bush*, pp.8-10.

the “national frame is still institutionally there...and has to be filled...not with the unfolding story of liberal democracy, nor with the admirable bushman and his ethos”,<sup>42</sup> when we evaluate these ideas from a post-Sassurian point of view, it can be argued that the myth of the ‘Australian Legend’ has not remained an historically located discourse; but rather a dormant mystique called upon when an identity is required, existing within a linguistic structure that continues through time.

Existing within the structures of meaning set up in white Australian society through literature and popular culture, the ‘Australian Legend’ has arguably become an ideal, an image of nationalism, and can be drawn on as a tradition. This idea of a ‘tradition’ or an ‘ideal’ means a construction of the nation’s idea(s) of itself. From this approach, what we understand as an entity, namely the Australian nation, is a fantasy. Renata Selacl argues that in order to understand a national identity, we must first examine the way a ‘nation’ perceives itself. She suggests that “a country is always . . . a kind of fiction: a country is not only ‘a piece of land’”.<sup>43</sup> It is through a psychoanalytic approach that Selacl defines a ‘nation’ as a fantasy. She offers a means of understanding the construct of the nation as lying at the heart of the subject, or member of society. Selacl refers to Lacanian psychoanalysis by suggesting that it is in fantasy that the subjects of the nation find a kind of fixity or stability. It is this stability, or coherent identity which the subject is seeking. Fantasy is what fills the space when the subject asks ‘What am I, what place do I occupy within the nation?’ Answering this question involves assuming the identity of an object. For Lacan, the assumption of an identity is the result of the subject invoking an object as real.<sup>44</sup> He argues that within a linguistic structure, words are alienating, and it this failure of words to adequately designate our being which requires fantasy

<sup>42</sup> Goodman, D. 1996, “Australian Identity, Postmodernism and History”, p.51.

<sup>43</sup> Selacl, R. 1994, “The Fantasy Structure of War: The Case of Bosnia”, in *The Spoils of Freedom: Psychoanalysis and Feminism after the Fall of Socialism*, R. Selacl, Routledge, New York, p.15. [hereafter “The Fantasy Structure of War”].

<sup>44</sup> Lacan, J. 1992, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, Seminar No. 7, 1959-1960*, transl. Dennis Porter, Tavistock/Routledge, London. [hereafter *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*].

to link the subject and the object.<sup>45</sup> In this way, “[f]antasy gives consistency to what we call ‘reality’”.<sup>46</sup> Slavoj Žižek argues a similar thesis in “Enjoy Your Nation As Yourself”.<sup>47</sup> Like Selacl, Žižek suggests a way of understanding the nation through understanding the identity of the subject as a construct. His questions concerning “elementary notions about national identification” help to offer a means of understanding the way a community organises its relationship towards the national ideal.<sup>48</sup> He argues that it is fantasy which fills a space in the community and organises its “way of life” or mode of enjoyment. Human desire, being mediated by fantasy, is never “grounded in true interests”,<sup>49</sup> which means that the nation and its subjects must maintain that fantasy-space in order to maintain a coherent national identity. Therefore, fantasy “functions as a scenario that conceals the ultimate inconsistency of society”.<sup>50</sup> This inconsistency demonstrates that there always remains a bond between members of society that is shared but cannot be articulated. In Australia’s case, it is the ‘nation’ which cannot be articulated; or symbolised. “The nation is an element in us that is ‘more than ourselves’, something that defines us but at the same time is undefinable; we cannot specify what it means, nor can we erase it”.<sup>51</sup> More importantly, it is something that we are compelled to find. Lacan enunciates this as the relationship with *das Ding*; the lost object. “It is in its nature that the object as such is lost. It will never be found”.<sup>52</sup> Lacan argues, however, that despite the compulsion to find the object, it perpetually evades discovery. He posits this object “*das Ding*, as the absolute Other of the subject, that one is supposed to find again. It is to be found at the most as something missed. One doesn’t find it, only its pleasurable associations”.<sup>53</sup> The notion of *das Ding*, therefore, resides in a paradoxical structure. There is no coherent whole; the object to find again was never

<sup>45</sup> Lacan, J. 1992, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*.

<sup>46</sup> Selacl, R. 1994, “The Fantasy Structure of War”, p.15.

<sup>47</sup> Žižek, S. 1993, “Enjoy Your Nation As Yourself”, in *Tarrying With The Negative: Kant, Hegel and The Critique of Ideology*, ed. S. Žižek, Duke University Press, New York, p.208. [hereafter “Enjoy Your Nation As Yourself”].

<sup>48</sup> Žižek, S. 1993, “Enjoy Your Nation As Yourself”, p.200.

<sup>49</sup> Žižek, S. 1993, “Enjoy Your Nation As Yourself”, p.215.

<sup>50</sup> Selacl, R. 1994, “The Fantasy Structure of War”, p.15.

<sup>51</sup> Selacl, R. 1994, “The Fantasy Structure of War”, p.15.

<sup>52</sup> Lacan, J. 1992, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p.52.

there. There never was a 'nation' to be found, nor a coherent national identity. It is a fantasy. For Lacan, 'the Thing' is the element "initially isolated by the subject in his experience of the subject (*Nebenmensch*), as being by its very nature alien (*fremde*)", or other; that which escapes signification, remaining at a distance from the symbolic.<sup>54</sup> It remains part of the subject in that it cannot be signified, and it is object, being 'the Thing' which compels the quest for satisfaction. We can say, therefore, that it is linked to the real, which "persists unchanged in the midst of radical upheavals in the society's symbolic identity".<sup>55</sup> It is the core that remains the same, forming a bond which unites the nation, so that the nation can perceive itself as a homogeneous entity.

I suggest that the nation called Australia has experienced a long history of many attempts of consolidating the dominant culture of the colonising Europeans, resting heavily on an articulation of the 'Australian Legend' as an ideal. This figure therefore, links the subject of the nation and the object. The 'bushman' gives consistency to 'reality', filling the space in the community and structuring its desire. Contemporary writers have attempted to dismantle this fantasy structure, leaving a question as to whether this national myth has become something sacred, a symbol of the existence of the nation.<sup>56</sup> Despite the insistence that the identity of the 'bushman' is no longer appropriate, that image is not necessary *per se*. It is the fantasy framing the 'bushman', or 'Australian Legend', which is required by the nation to structure an individual's particular relationship with the nation. By drawing on Selacl, I suggest that by threatening the way members of society identify with national fantasy, the structure of the nation is threatened.<sup>57</sup> In calling for a redefinition of an Australian national identity writers are suggesting that Australians must "reinvent

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<sup>53</sup> Lacan, J. 1992, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p.52.

<sup>54</sup> Lacan, J. 1992, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p.52.

<sup>55</sup> Zizek, S. 1993, "Enjoy Your Nation As Yourself", p.208. Lacan formulates three registers of human reality; the real, the symbolic and the imaginary. The real is everything excluded from the symbolic, not 'reality' which is best defined as an amalgam of symbolic and imaginary. See Leader, D. & Groves, J. 1995, *Lacan For Beginners*, Icon Books, Cambridge; and Lacan, J. 1992, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*.

<sup>56</sup> Selacl, R. 1994, "The Fantasy Structure of War", p.15.

national myths and start perceiving themselves in a new way”.<sup>58</sup> In Australia, however, the ‘bushman’ remains articulated as an ideal within a dominant linguistic structure. If we consider the nation as a construct, and accept that “fantasy brings consistency to our desire”,<sup>59</sup> then it can be argued that Australians will continue to structure their identity in relation to national fantasy. In this case it is a fantasy that rests on an idealisation of an Australian character; one that captures the Australian essence; one that has become part of the construction of the ‘nation’.

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<sup>57</sup> Selael, R. 1994, “The Fantasy Structure of War”, p.15.

<sup>58</sup> Selael, R. 1994, “The Fantasy Structure of War”, p.15.

<sup>59</sup> Selael, R. 1994, “The Fantasy Structure of War”, p.15.

## Chapter 1:2

# THE FANTASY OF NATIONALISM

In forms of representation, literature, historical writing, the media and the film industry, we find Australian culture being articulated and meaning being structured. Historically in white Australian culture, these meanings have centred around the 'bushman' of the outback. Australian society has been exposed to the reproduction of these meanings so often that they have become a national ideal. By employing Lacanian psychoanalysis Schaffer suggests that it is this national type which comes to represent

the self and the nation in a way which is imaginary. Yet his existence is made to seem real through representation in films, advertisements, political speeches, news reports, historical reconstructions and the like. The imaginary construction which is taken to be real is given social meaning through the symbolic order of language.<sup>1</sup>

If we accept that Australia's conception as a nation has come about through structures of language, then we can evaluate how images, ideals and the identity of the subject can extend beyond the limits of the body and be constituted within a complex social network.

It is in what Lacan calls the *mirror-phase* that we find an explanation of the subject's initial identification with an image outside itself.<sup>2</sup> The *mirror-phase* is based on a time when a human child recognises its own image in a mirror. Prior to this time there is no sense of self; there is no *ego* unifying their body. It is the initial stage when humans are unable to walk or talk, and have no knowledge of language which surrounds them. Lacan suggests that there is a moment of recognition which

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<sup>1</sup> Schaffer, K. 1988, *Women and The Bush*, p.9.

<sup>2</sup> Lacan, J. 1994, "The Mirror-phase as Formative of the Function of the I", in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. S. Zizek, Verso, New York, p.93. [hereafter "The Mirror-phase as Formative"].



results in “illuminatory mimicry”; what he calls an “essential moment of the act of intelligence”,<sup>3</sup> when the child identifies with an image outside himself, whether it is another child or a mirror image. We can understand this moment of identification as a moment of transformation; when the subject assumes an image for the first time. Lacan argues that all further recognitions will be structured by this moment. It is the instance of the *ego* before its social determination. Beyond this moment of recognition of the *I*, the total form of the body anticipated by the subject, identification is assumed as *Gestalt*; a whole unified image. It is an image of self as an object seen from a position of exteriority. It is this external thing that the child assumes.<sup>4</sup>

We can draw on Lacan’s *mirror-phase* to understand how a coherent body-image is formed. In the case of Australia, this coherent body-image is provided by the nation, an image which can be assumed by the subject, and will provide a buttress for what falls outside the image of a unified collective self. In Australia it is evident that the images of the nation and the national character serve social and ideological functions. Ultimately, there is no ‘real’ Australia, no essence behind the images. Rather, the image of the ‘Australian Legend’ is reproduced, offering meaning which endlessly circulates to represent the real. According to Lacan, our identity can be understood within the terms of the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The real is that which lies beyond language and cannot be grasped within it.<sup>5</sup> Instead, what we actually perceive as ‘reality’ is an amalgam of the Symbolic and the Imaginary registers. The Symbolic register is the networks of language and meaning into which the child is born. The Imaginary is a state of being which is imagined as real but

<sup>3</sup> Lacan, J. 1994, “The Mirror-phase as Formative”, p.93.

<sup>4</sup> The *mirror-phase* is this moment which ultimately structures the development of identity. It is discussed in full detail by Lacan, J. 1994, “The Mirror Phase As Formative of the Function of The I”, in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. S. Zizek, Verso, New York. An overview here gives an understanding of the role the *mirror-phase* plays in the construction of identity from which national identity is an extension.

<sup>5</sup> Lacan, J. 1968, “The Mirror-phase”, in *New Left Review*, Vol.51 1968, New Left Review Ltd, London, pp.71-7. [hereafter “The Mirror-phase”].

actually arises through fantasies, memories, illusory images of the self and the like.<sup>6</sup> We can draw on this conception of the subject to understand national identity. As an ideal self is imaginary, so too, is the national identity. It does not exist, and so is a fantasy. “But it is what [Australians] want to believe is true. It signifies a cultural identity as a nation and a people similar to and different from others”.<sup>7</sup> Following this approach, as a member of Australian society, it is impossible to be totally removed from the wider culture existing within the structures of the nation. It is a culture which influences us daily and which we imbibe. The linguistic structure works to uphold the values of its representation system. When we closely examine the representations brought to us through cultural institutions we can see that they become “so habitual, so much part of the daily fabric of living, that they themselves become naturalised, a form of false consciousness”.<sup>8</sup>

Zygmunt Bauman suggests that modern ideas of nationalism rest on a “state-administered ‘universal’ identity. . . Under state management, identities had to be an outcome of planned, managed, ‘rational’ action”.<sup>9</sup> By evaluating ideas of immortality, Bauman offers an understanding of the ways society contributes to the preservation and perpetuation of the group. He argues that

bodily continuation of the population does not by itself secure the continuation of the society (culture, civilisation etc.) ‘as we know it’. Durability is to be secured not for life *in general*, but for a *specific form* of collective life; and this means a specific structure of domination, a certain allocation of privileges, a given distribution of freedom and dependency as well as of the chances of individual immortality - all those arrangements chosen from among other conceivable

<sup>6</sup> Lacan, J. 1968, “The Mirror-phase”, pp.71-7.

<sup>7</sup> Selaci, R. 1994, “The Fantasy Structure of War”, p.15. Selaci is referring to ideas of nationalism in Bosnia, however, a similar understanding of Australian society can be reached.

<sup>8</sup> Looker, P. 1994, “Doing it with your mates: connecting aspects of modern Australian masculinity”, in *The Abundant Culture: Meaning and Significance In Everyday Australia*, eds. D. Headon, J. Hooton, & D. Horne, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p.207. [hereafter “Doing it with your mates”].

<sup>9</sup> Bauman, Z. 1992, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, Polity Press, Cambridge, p.99. [hereafter *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*].



alternatives, to give the group its distinctive identity and the meaning to its survival.<sup>10</sup>

Society continues to monitor this distinctive identity. In Australia's case, it is the 'Australian Legend' which is perpetuated. Bauman points to Michel Foucault's thesis of surveillance and the way the 'state' organises the masses.<sup>11</sup> He argues that it is group immortality which manifests in contemporary society as *nationalism*; a strategy employed by the state as a "programme of unification and a postulate of homogeneity".<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, it is "invariably a bid for the sole and exclusive rights to a territory, a population, a populated territory".<sup>13</sup> By applying Bauman's theories to the Australian circumstance it can be argued that through articulation of the 'Australian Legend', the nation is hailed as the "supreme value, hovering above the short-lived, mortal lives of its members, only as long as it could be shown that it [is] exposed to a threat, in the face of which members had to huddle together to be sure of their survival".<sup>14</sup> The ideal of the 'Australian Legend' is promoted to ensure homogeneity. Drawn upon in times of trauma and threat, the ideal is restated in society to encourage cohesion and uniformity; a united front against what lies outside. This united front, the nation, "hangs on what is being spoken and those who speak it. Unlike the race, the nation is incomplete without its conscience arousing spokesmen and spiritual leading lights".<sup>15</sup>

In the Australian situation, these "conscience arousing spokesmen" stand as representatives of the linguistic structure of society. The media, the film industry,

<sup>10</sup> Bauman, Z. 1992, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, p.104.

<sup>11</sup> Bauman, Z. 1992, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, p.105. These theoretical approaches are important to this argument, however, a full evaluation is beyond the scope of this paper. For further examples of post-structuralist theory see Foucault, M. 1977, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, transl. A.M. Sheridan-Smith, Allen Lane, London; Foucault, M. 1972, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, transl. A.M. Sheridan-Smith, Tavistock, London; Derrida, J. 1976, *Of Grammatology*, Johns Hopkins University Press, London; and Derrida, J. 1978, *Writing and Difference*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.

<sup>12</sup> Bauman, Z. 1992, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, p.105.

<sup>13</sup> Bauman, Z. 1992, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, p.105.

<sup>14</sup> Bauman, Z. 1992, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, p.106.

<sup>15</sup> Bauman, Z. 1992, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, p.108.

literary writers and film makers have become the “wardens of the nation’s immortality”.<sup>16</sup> They offer society a ‘truth’. It is this ‘truth’ which reveals that the reality of the nation is both absolute and relative. Bauman writes that

no wonder the nations of the nationalists are constantly at war against their own inner ambivalence and logical incongruence. . . Lest [they] should suffocate under the rising mounds of ambiguity, nations are called to be vigilant against the strangers in their midst, those false pretenders who claim soil and blood that are not their own, the outspoken detractors of the sanctity of national symbols or, worse still, the deceitful flatterers trying slyly to drown their alienness in the torrent of mendacious praise.<sup>17</sup>

If we apply Bauman’s ideas to the Australian nation, it is arguable that when writers claim to offer a new means of determining the subject within society, they are threatening the “sanctity of national symbols”. The need for affiliations, the need to uphold the ideal of the ‘Australian Legend’, is stronger than these writers imagine. Unless society induces and keeps alive the collective fantasy of the Australian nation, then arguably the nation will no longer exist, for to deny the contemporary role of the ‘Australian Legend’ is to deny identification with the nation.<sup>18</sup> This is why, beneath the surface of representations in film, literature, historical representations and the media, we continue to find images of the ‘real’ Australian which are rigorously applied and reinforced in order to protect the immortality of the nation. Despite many arguments from contemporary scholars who suggest that Australia maintains plural identities, cultural analysis continues to reveal how tenacious this identity is and how it continues to dominate public discourse, representation and collective enactments of nation. It is an ideal which continues to be reproduced and its presence is recorded in popular culture.

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<sup>16</sup> Bauman, Z. 1992, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, p.109.

<sup>17</sup> Bauman, Z. 1992, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, pp.109-110.

<sup>18</sup> Bauman, Z. 1992, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, pp.116-117. Bauman at no time refers to the Australian situation, rather an overall concept of nation which I have applied to this particular example.



When Hamish Wallace's plane crashed in 1993, the 'Australian Legend' and its semantic structures came into play. The media articles and broadcasts following the accident re-stated this Australian identity and its relationship with the bush. By closely examining some of the articles produced at the time of the accident we can see the way this ideal is continuously established and maintained through discourse and brought to the public through the media.

Peter Patrick wrote in his article *Flightmare*:

*Deep in the heart of NSW's Blue Mountains, Wheengee Whungee Creek harboured its terrible, agonising secret for three weeks. On its dark ferny banks, two young men had awaited rescue from a plane crash, before succumbing to cold and hunger. To many, it was incomprehensible in the 1990's that such a tragic loss of life could occur just 30 minutes flying time from Sydney. The young men were a modern day Burke and Wills: victims of missed signals, inexperience, poor communication and bad luck.*<sup>19</sup>

Mark Whittaker developed a similar theme in *Flight To Nowhere*:

*It was..only minutes before the crash that they were flying over Sydney's south-western suburbs and it must have seemed bizarre that they were in a formidable mountain wilderness - the Kanangra Boyd National Park. They would well have understood the naming of nearby landmarks: Mount Hopeless, a kilometre away; Mount Misery two kilometres away; Devastation Gully, just over the hill; Despond Ridge and Sorrow Spur just beyond that. As soon as they started to walk along its (Spinebender Creek's) twisting trail, they would have despised it. The further along they travelled, the worse it got; their brown leather street shoes no match for the murderous, slime-covered rocks. As they slipped and slid, reaching out to steady*

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<sup>19</sup> Patrick, P. 1994, "Flightmare", in *The Sydney Morning Herald: The Good Weekend Magazine*, May 7, 1994, p.22.

*themselves, all handholds were covered with stinging nettles, which are everywhere. It is a horrible little creek to walk.*<sup>20</sup>

Les Kennedy and Jason Offord described the tragedy as *A Cruel End*:

*They perished trying to find their way out of the no-man's land of winding gorges, towering ridges and mercilessly dense bush. Their path was leading to a dead-end gorge - an 800m precipice near Spine Bender Creek - and looming 2km beyond were the cloud-shrouded slopes of Mt Hopeless.*<sup>21</sup>

The language used by the media to convey an image of the accident is crucial to this restatement of national identity and to perpetuate "group immortality". It comes to the reader under a guise of fact, unadorned, promising an easy read. The representations are familiar, the narration suggesting the author was there, that the story is a first-hand account. Jennifer Rutherford suggests that this kind of prose "mirrors a dominant cultural idealisation of forthrightness and plain speech".<sup>22</sup> This assertion echoes Ward's depiction of the 'Australian Legend' as practical, taciturn, and wary of intellectual pursuits, further demonstrating the extent to which these ideals pervade popular culture in Australia. Plain speech is demanded, required for the reader to absorb the story as 'truth'. Rutherford suggests that the reader is "re-experiencing the reproduction of an Australia that insists on its authentic representation in a language unperturbed by any sense of inadequacy".<sup>23</sup> The Australian media is filled with examples of this ideal. John Laws, for example, is often regarded as the 'voice' of Australia, unabashedly employing a plain speaking persona. His program *Keeping The Dream Alive* on Sydney radio is relayed to countless rural radio stations while he continues to fortify the ideals of the

<sup>20</sup> Whittaker, M. 1994, "Flight To Nowhere", in *The Australian Magazine*, September 10-11, 1994, p.14.

<sup>21</sup> Kennedy, L. & Offord, J. 1993, "A Cruel End: Cold Reality Ends Mum's Hope", in *The Daily Telegraph*, October 27, 1993.

<sup>22</sup> Rutherford, J. 1996, *The Gauche Intruder: A Lacanian Introduction to the Australian Good*, PhD Thesis, UNSW, Sydney, p.203. [hereafter *The Gauche Intruder*].

<sup>23</sup> Rutherford, J. 1996, *The Gauche Intruder*, p.203.

bushman.<sup>24</sup> He is constructed as a man who speaks his mind, and therefore 'truth'; the ultimate Australian Legend demanding maintenance of the nation.

Under the guise of reporting 'truth', the media evidence the accident in a way that emphasises the otherness of an untamed section of bush that lies within Australian boundaries. It is important to reveal that it lies outside 'civilised' life, but that it threatens nonetheless. The use of terms such as 'succumbing', 'murderous', 'no-man's land', and 'mercilessly dense bush' emphasises the persistent European-based perception of the Australian bush; the threat of the outback and the bush to the 'Australian Legend', contrasted with the 'Australian dream'. To be a 'real' Australian we must "keep the dream alive". What is the dream? *Burke's Backyard*, for example, broadcast a segment on John Laws as their 'famous' guest on the program.<sup>25</sup> They demonstrated to a captive audience how we are to "keep the dream alive". John Laws revealed his version of the homestead in the bush, at one with nature, the bushman enjoying the perfectly cooked steak on the 'barbie'. Despite viewers encountering a vast expanse of perfectly manicured lawns and mature European deciduous trees, there was no doubt as to what the dream is. The ideal of the 'Aussie home', a piece of land to lay claim to, to mould into the ideal, is a crucial part of contemporary Australian life. It is only in that space that the 'Australian Legend' is safe, unthreatened and coherent.

This approach to the landscape is evident in many areas of contemporary Australian culture, not only in journalism. Peter Read points to a process of possession which was a means of familiarising the colonists with the landscape. "Phrases like 'the far north', 'the never-never', demonstrated a continuing apprehension about the vastness of the land".<sup>26</sup> It is through representations of the landscape that we find the desire for possession, and a means of presenting a favourable, inhabited view of the Australian landscape. Artists such as John Glover and Eugene von Guerard produced

<sup>24</sup> Laws, J. *Keeping The Dream Alive*, 10am weekdays, 2UE radio, Sydney.

<sup>25</sup> Burke, D. *Burkes Backyard*, Channel Nine television, March 1997.

<sup>26</sup> Read, P. 1996, *Returning To Nothing*, p.138.

scenes which emphasised symbols of prosperity, ownership and control. Read suggests that “[t]he Australian landscape was becoming known, understood and psychologically enclosed”.<sup>27</sup> At the Australian National Gallery we can currently view an exhibition of 19th century Australian and American landscape painting.<sup>28</sup> In reviewing the exhibition, Deborah Jones writes that “a viewer can visit a distant past, explore a safely contained wilderness” in the text of the paintings. Jones’ choice of words; “a safely contained wilderness” emphasise the way the artists offer an ideal which is transposed as ‘truth’, and the way the contemporary Australian can incorporate a ‘vision’ of the nation. The paintings are frequently inhabited by white Australians, revealing a “desire to see a land that was inhabited”, to overcome the unpleasantness of the “exile” to Australia and to inscribe the landscape with our own meaning.<sup>29</sup>

It is this process of inscribing the landscape with meaning which is evident in the accident of October, 1993. The recording of names such as Mount Hopeless, Devastation Gully, Despond Ridge and Sorrow Spur by the journalists who reported on the accident reveals another linguistic style. Paul Carter suggests that the significance of these names lies in an understanding that we “move within a cultural network of names, allusions, puns and coincidences, which [give us] conceptual space in which to move”.<sup>30</sup> Rather than these names being intrinsic to the bush in which the boys were found, they are arbitrarily imposed on that place, they represent a vision of the Australian nation which emerged out of European beginnings. In the naming of the landscape, colonising Europeans created a historical space through language by transforming an unknown landscape into “an object of knowledge, something that could be explored and read”.<sup>31</sup> The media claim these place names as

<sup>27</sup> Read, P. 1996, *Returning To Nothing*, p.138.

<sup>28</sup> National Gallery of Australia, 1998, “New Worlds From Old”, Exhibition, Canberra, March 7-May 31, 1998.

<sup>29</sup> Jones, D. 1998, “Past Masters of New Worlds”, in *The Weekend Australian: Review*, February 7-8, 1998, pp.4-6.

<sup>30</sup> Carter, P. 1987, *The Road To Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, p.7. [hereafter *The Road To Botany Bay*].

<sup>31</sup> Carter, P. 1987, *The Road To Botany Bay*, p.68.



a figure of speech to remind society of the perceived dangers of the Australian bush. The journalists create the scene for their readers, the names speak with authority. Prior to the writing of the name only a shadowy outline of the place exists in the readers mind.

In this way, the media re-created the fantasy of the 'Australian Legend' not only through semantic structures found in the language of newspaper articles. The fantasy was repeated through visual cues by showing vast shots of the mysterious mountains which are waiting to swallow the unwary Australian. In this way, the landscape provides an other against which the bushman is constructed.<sup>32</sup> By examining the methods of filming used to convey the scene of the accident, we can see that the gaze of the viewer is directed towards the mysterious and terrible Australian landscape. The camera focuses on a landscape which is vast and distant, as the camera attempts to give us full access to the imposing scene.<sup>33</sup> From the outset, the camera opens up the possibilities for a re-creation of the myth of the 'Australian Legend'. The audience identifies with the boys and is offered the landscape of the Kanangra Boyd National Park as a mystery which has posed the threat of loss of identity. It is constructed as a representation of how the natural world threatens at every turn, as 'civilisation' battles with the forces of nature; we must protect ourselves from this dangerous natural entity which is waiting to overpower us. Through these constructions, the fantasy of the bush as a mysterious and powerful landscape circulates through the narratives of history, fiction and film. The reporting by the media ensures that the accident takes its place within the structure of the 'Australian Legend'. It is an ideal which remains within the linguistic structure of

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<sup>32</sup> An understanding of the landscape constructed as a feminine other has been fully evaluated by many writers. It is an important issue, however, this paper does not offer the scope for a reasonable evaluation. See Schaffer, K. 1988, *Women and The Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Schaffer evaluates the ways in which the feminine is present in the bush tradition, not necessarily in actual figures of women inhabiting the bush, but in responses to the bush itself.

<sup>33</sup> *Hinch*, Channel Seven television, and *A Current Affair*, Channel Nine television each followed the story for the duration of the search. Special stories were run on October 26, 1993 on both television shows. Each show broadcast images such as these.

white Australian culture waiting to be restated as a means of continuing the 'war' against the untamed Australian bush.

In order to sustain the ideal, it is important that society counters the loss of identity by recognising the boys' actions as heroic and as representing the ideal. In the tradition of the bushman to not give in to the bush, Hamish and Scott fight for life; they are revealed as a manifestation of the national 'type'. The media portray a sense of indestructible optimism and mateship that cannot be destroyed by death. It further provides a rebuke for the more sophisticated and 'modern' Australian who has forgotten the perils of living in the bush; nature will continue to threaten the Australian way of life. The production of their image as the egalitarian, unpretentious, laid-back mate from the bush demonstrates a desire for society to believe in the national identity and a national type which can be located in history and real life. It is a category which is constructed within a dominant power structure, existing within a system of related meanings through which they are defined. They were ready to 'have a go', and in doing so evidence the combination of lawlessness and morality that is 'essential' to the traditional construction of the Australian identity. These attributes identify the 'self' as a norm against which each of us is measured, defined, desired, included or excluded as subjects of culture. Lacan argues that meaning is not inherent in individuals, rather, they are embedded in networks of other arbitrary but related meanings.<sup>34</sup> Through the articulation of the meanings surrounding the 'bushman', this figure has become the ego-ideal. I would suggest that the vision of the nation as a coherent whole rests upon articulation of the 'Australian Legend', an ideal that provides Australia, as the mirror provides the child in the *mirror phase*, with the illusion of coherency. This in turn protects it from disintegration. The myth of the 'Australian Legend' is one that has been constructed to fill the spaces in history, and to give us the reassurance of nationhood. This creation has endured as the representation of an authentic Australian identity.

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<sup>34</sup> Grigg, R. 1991, "The Ethics of Desire", in *Analysis*, No. 3. 1991, Blackwell, Oxford, pp.21-28. [hereafter "The Ethics Of Desire"].

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Hamish Wallace, who had little in common with the 'Australian Legend's identity, nevertheless was produced by the media as the 'typical' Australian. The accident itself, and the nature of Hamish's and Scott's survival, demonstrates how disparate aspects of identity can be overlooked, replaced with values of the 'bushman' to reinforce the Australian ego-ideal. Instead of the boys suffering a lonely, horrific death which resulted from their own stupidity, the media claimed they were heroes, embodying the ideal, displaying the courage and mateship that we require from the 'real' Australian. It is this idealised self that comes into play in the accident of October 3, 1993. Not only was this ideal self produced by the media, there remains a paradox in the story. I suggest that this ego-ideal played a role in producing the events. On the morning of Sunday, October 3, 1993, the weather over the Blue Mountains to the west of Sydney was seemingly impenetrable. When Scott and Hamish arrived at Bankstown airport to take their trip, several pilots and ground crew suggested that the flight was not possible. Many aircraft had taken off that morning only to return without making it over the mountains. When Hamish and Scott encountered the recommendations of the ground crew at Bankstown they were faced with two choices. The first was to abort the trip, to give in to the experience and the authority of those on the ground. The second was to realise their need to correspond to the ego-ideal. The action became a question of the moral law of the Australian nation against the written law of aviation. They flew. In doing so, Scott would have had to break regulations and fly beneath 200 feet. A dangerous manoeuvre on a good day. They were, however, young, Australian males. They were going to 'have a go'.

We can ask, did Hamish and Scott perform this action for the sake of what Kant calls the moral law? Did they obey the ego-ideal of the 'bushman' out of respect for the law itself, ignoring their desire? Lacan postulates that Kant failed to recognise the

perverse pleasure gained by submitting to the moral law. Lacan's notion of *jouissance*, sheds some light on the nature of this decision to submit to the moral law.<sup>35</sup> Lacan argues that "the very act of compliance with the moral law for the sake of the moral law itself...produces a surplus of satisfaction".<sup>36</sup> Lacan calls this surplus *jouissance*, and argues that *jouissance* enjoins us to do our duty for duty's sake. We obey the moral law because it is a moral law, and not for any positive reason. Paradoxically, this renunciation of *desire* produces a "certain surplus - enjoyment".<sup>37</sup> The notion of *jouissance* has its origins in the Oedipus complex, which posits the "mother as the source of original satisfaction", what Lacan calls *das Ding*, as lost object.<sup>38</sup> In this case, the lost object is posited as Australia as a 'nation', which is founded on the fantasy of the Australian identity. Fantasy mediates the division between the subject and 'the Thing'. The fantasy of Australian identity enjoined Hamish and Scott to recognise its enjoyment and satisfaction, but in approaching 'the Thing', the 'nation', its horrifying kernel is apparent. For Kant, a self-interested action is based on desire, while an action for the sake of the moral law may override one's self-interest and well-being.<sup>39</sup> Likewise, Lacan would have us recognise that "desire is a function of the law" and "involves the sacrifice of the body".<sup>40</sup> Reflecting on Hamish's and Scott's actions on October 3, 1993, as they contemplated the forthcoming trip, weighing desire and duty, we can surmise that they did not conform with their own self-interest, nor their well-being. These seemingly important things were not at issue. Hamish and Scott, at a very fundamental level found themselves confronted with desire and the moral law. In choosing the moral law of the Australian nation and its identity, they experienced the *jouissance* of complying with the ego-ideal, sacrificing themselves in the process. They conformed with their ego-ideal, and privileged duty over desire. In this way we can see that *jouissance* is "the self-contentment that the subject derives from their

<sup>35</sup> Lacan, J. 1992, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*.

<sup>36</sup> Grigg, R. 1991, "The Ethics of Desire", p.31.

<sup>37</sup> Grigg, R. 1991, "The Ethics of Desire", p.31.

<sup>38</sup> Grigg, R. 1991, "The Ethics of Desire", p.31.

<sup>39</sup> Grigg, R. 1991, "The Ethics of Desire", p.31.

<sup>40</sup> Grigg, R. 1991, "The Ethics of Desire", p.35.

moral experience in submitting to the moral law which nevertheless makes them suffer".<sup>41</sup> I would suggest that Hamish and Scott acted out of a need to conform to the Australian ego-ideal. Their *jouissance* is derived from submitting to the moral law; in other words, acting in conformity with the ego-ideal, which in this case is the 'Australian Legend'. By ignoring the warnings of the ground crew, Hamish and Scott approached the Australian 'Thing', taking on the values of the 'bushman'. The irrationality of the decision to fly, to "have a go" emphasises the characteristics of the Australian ideal; toughness, adaptability, freedom, commitment and mateship. The need to correspond to the ego-ideal cost them their lives, but the media stepped in to claim those lives for the fantasy and to continue to uphold the moral law.

Hamish and Scott, therefore, come to us as the embodiment of the 'Australian Legend' and while they fail to resolve their struggle for survival against the bush, it remains a powerful fantasy which continues to encode the individual Australian and the land. It is the landscape which is encoded as a crucial part of the Australian ego-ideal. The landscape has been encoded as harsh, unforgiving; the outback; the dead heart. "It is against this land that the Australian character measures his identity. It can be a place of vision and inspiration but most often it is represented as a hostile, barren environment".<sup>42</sup> I experienced what can be described as a manifestation of the nationalist tradition when I felt that the bush 'took' my brother, rather than a realisation that his death resulted from his own desire to comply with the ego-ideal. Hamish's fight, his death, illuminated the landscape as a thing to be loathed and feared, not just threatening death, but acting on that promise. This reaction was my own recognition of the ego-ideal and the constructions of the bush within the nationalist structure of the 'Australian Legend'. While the meanings which can be attached to the nation are potentially without limit, they have become fixed and regulated over time, constituted through systems of meanings. The reception of the event is, therefore, symbolically encoded. A 'code' of nationalism has emerged to

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<sup>41</sup> Grigg, R. 1991, "The Ethics of Desire", p.31.

<sup>42</sup> Schaffer, K. 1988, *Women and The Bush*, p.22.

structure the 'bushman's' battle against the Australian landscape. I suggest that the desire for a united nation has resulted in a national identity which provides a point of unity and a means of claiming the Australian landscape. I, along with many others involved with the accident, chose to overlook the paradox that through their actions Scott and Hamish came to embody the Australian ego-ideal, yet it was this very fantasy which resulted in their deaths. It is, therefore, the act of complying with the moral law that brought about their deaths in the name of the nation and it is in those deaths that we find the means to not only maintain national identity and immortality of the nation, but to inscribe the Australian landscape with meaning and to claim it as our own.



# THE HOMECOMING

## PART 2

# DEATH

*They say he has buried Eteokles  
with full and just and lawful honors due the dead;  
but Polyneices, who dies as pitiably-  
Kreon has proclaimed that his body will stay unburied;  
no mourners, no tomb, no tears,  
a tasty meal for vultures.*

*Antigone, Sophocles*

# THE HOMECOMING

*It was some time before the authorities released the bodies for burial after they were found. Determining 'cause of death' seemed crucial at the time - we had to know 'why'? Why did he die? What had happened to them? Why didn't they make it? The bodies went to the forensic pathologists in Sydney for tests. Eventually Hamish was brought home. The night before the funeral we took the things we wanted buried with him to the funeral home. In a moment of anxiety that I had nothing to give him as a parting gift I took his favourite red bandanna. I still experience moments of guilt that it wasn't something more profound, more appropriate. There are no guidelines to any of this though. It's difficult to know what to do. These moments just become part of the process of saying goodbye and dealing with the loss any way you can.*

*The day of the funeral dawned clear and hot in Forbes. The funeral car arrived and we piled into it for our own journey. There was a huge crowd waiting at the church. It is a tiny building and a sound system had been set up to relay the service to those forced into the garden. It was quite surreal to walk into the church surrounded by friends who reached back many years. It was an evocative, traditional setting for such an encounter with death. The service was very strange. A process of saying goodbye to someone you want to stay. The words seemed meaningless; incapable of encompassing everything that needed to be said.*

*The service came to an end to the transcendent sound of a lone bagpiper. Hamish played the bagpipes. Of all things that sound belongs to him in my mind. The pallbearers carried him to the hearse where he began his final physical journey. There were so many people. About one thousand, the funeral director said. The sea of people moved to their cars; we piled back into the car and followed him. The piper walked in front, announcing to the world that he was coming home. The road had to be closed for so many cars and police stood on street corners saluting the procession. The town had stopped to watch. It was a reminder of what had happened; of the people who had helped us; of those who had given so*

*much support in our search to find him. They had come out to see his homecoming.*

*That afternoon he was buried with family where we could always watch over him and remember. Afterwards friends and family gathered at a funeral tea. People crammed into the cheerful rooms of my grandparents house incongruous with the still unbelievable nature of his absence. Banalities were scattered as an ineffective weapon against the threatening grief. "Life goes on; "Don't cry, he wouldn't want you to grieve"; You just have to get on with your life". The comments are almost a warning. Don't upset the structure of separation and control. Keep death at a distance at all times. Don't let it into your life, because it might get into mine.*

*I suppose in hindsight I can claim we were lucky. Rather than his death being swallowed by the everyday nature of society, the accident was extensively covered by the media and so it became one of the few 'public' deaths around which it is acceptable to grieve. There was a feeling of immortality about the sequence of events; he wasn't disappearing into anonymity. Jokes abounded amongst the younger people that he had finally got the attention he had always wanted. I didn't question why he was allowed this 'public' death at the time. I convinced myself that it was because he was such a wonderful person.*

*After the wake, which seemed like a bizarre re-enactment of a social gathering prior to his death only without him, it was time to settle down to the process of grieving - quietly and in private. The inquest was a year away. Answers would have to wait. The only relief lay in the Forbes Cemetery. The hordes of strangers had gone back to their lives, taking their planes and four-wheel drives back to weekend pursuits. Here in the cemetery was where he belonged. Standing on this land, sheltered from the world I was offered an understanding of the importance of death and the intrinsic role it plays in my own identity. The cemetery is a place from which all paths of life have diverged and yet where they all meet. My life unravels from this point - or rather, this place that is home.*

## Chapter 2:1

# THE MODERN DEATH

The media brought Scott and Hamish to the Australian public as heroes who had defied the bush. For those of us who knew them, there was a discrepancy between those public heroes and the bodies we were left with. These bodies remained absent from the discourse, the other of death, hidden from view. Instead the “nauseating spectacle of death” was replaced with the restated fantasy of the ‘bushman’.<sup>1</sup> It is this discrepancy I would like to address; that is, the way fantasies of nation can sustain a dead body as a fantasy object and at the same time elide death itself.



At some point in time, every one of us must die. It is this certainty of death which makes it a critical part of personal and social life. Life is, as Zygmunt Bauman suggests, “validated only by death, as death is its only obvious, ‘natural’ and unavoidable point of arrival”.<sup>2</sup> The certainty of death provides endless response within society. When we confront history, it is clear that death, and the fear of it, are addressed differently in different ages and societies. It is the interpretation of death, and how that interpretation is undergoing change that these chapters are concerned with. As this investigation will reveal, death - its interpretation and its images - have long-reaching consequences for a study of identity and its place within the structures of the nation. In Australian society, it can be argued that death prompts the construction of ideals and universal views which interact with social structure that surrounds national identity. Social boundaries and ideals do not end with death. Death remains the last word for society, and therefore a crucial part of the identity of individuals within that society.

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<sup>1</sup> Aries, P. 1981, *The Hour Of Our Death*, transl. H. Weaver, Alfred A. Knopf Inc., New York, p.13. [hereafter *The Hour Of Our Death*].

<sup>2</sup> Bauman, Z. 1992, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, p.88.

A passing look at contemporary mortuary practices in Australia does not illustrate the immense changes that have come about over the past two hundred years, nor evidence the influence these changes have had on society as a whole. At first glance, the rituals undertaken at the time of death follow what is looked upon as a traditional practice. However, broadly speaking, the experience of death in Western societies in the twentieth century stands in contrast to that of the nineteenth century and preceding centuries. It is when we consider the rituals established during the nineteenth century more closely that the error of this assertion is evident. A brief look at Victorian rituals of the nineteenth century demonstrates how much contemporary rituals surrounding death have changed since that time. James Stevens Curl describes the mortuary practices of the nineteenth century as “the Victorian Celebration of Death”, a time when cemeteries were showpieces and ostentatious displays of grief were required by society. The blinds of a house where a death had occurred were drawn; women were expected to partake in a deep and prolonged experience of grief; “[w]hole families, including servants were expected to wear mourning when a death occurred in the household”.<sup>3</sup> Mourning dress was an especially important part of the process, associated with a fear of the dead returning, symbolising night and an absence of colour; “and if the customs were not complied with, it was reckoned to be a sign of disrespect or worse”.<sup>4</sup> These requirements of the family of the deceased led to a lucrative business surrounding mortuary practices.<sup>5</sup> The style of the funeral and location of the grave in the cemetery established social position. Social requirements included everything down to the smallest detail, including such seemingly trivial details as black-edged stationery

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<sup>3</sup> Stevens Curl, J. 1972, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, David & Charles, London, pp.2-26. [hereafter *The Victorian Celebration of Death*]

<sup>4</sup> Stevens Curl, J. 1992, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, pp.7-9.

<sup>5</sup> See Howarth, G. 1997, “Professionalising The Funeral Industry in England 1700-1960”, in *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal*, eds. G. Howarth & P. Jupp, Macmillan Press, London; and Bardgett, A. 1994, “A Job For Life”, in *Ritual and Remembrance: Responses to Death in Human Societies*, ed. J. Davies, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, for in-depth evaluations of the role of entrepreneurial groups and undertakers in the rituals surrounding death.

and cards. Stevens Curl argues that “it was with a funeral, even more than with a wedding, that the wealth and power of a family could be publicly displayed”.<sup>6</sup>

Political and economic conditions of the nineteenth century also combined to place an emphasis on death. In Britain, as the population of London exploded during the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution brought a new experience of urbanisation; poor living conditions and sanitary problems leading to an increase in mortality rates.<sup>7</sup> Infant death and death in childbirth was common. Average lifespans were exceptionally short; death was an every day part of society. These enormous numbers of dead brought something of a revolt against the overfull city cemeteries and led to a demand for more secure resting places for bodies instead of the possibility of graves lying open after just a few months and bones removed to the anonymity of charnel houses. Julie Rugg describes how the population explosion of the nineteenth century in Britain brought considerable change to the burial practices of the time. She points out that prior to the nineteenth century, the majority of interments took place in the land surrounding the parish churches. The Church of England was the major provider of burial ground, but it failed to extend its churchyards to adjust for the increase in population. After the 1920s, however, the introduction of cemeteries outside the city areas broke a pattern of burial provision centred around the churchyard.<sup>8</sup> Peter Jupp also describes the changes brought about

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<sup>6</sup> Stevens Curl, J. 1972, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, pp.19-26. A full investigation into Victorian rituals is beyond the scope of this paper. James Stevens Curl goes into much detail on expectations of families in mourning and the conditions of the time. For further discussions on the same theme see Puckle, B. 1926, *Funeral Customs: Their Origin and Development*, Werner Laurie, London; and Briggs, A. 1968, *Victorian Cities*, Harmondsworth, London.

<sup>7</sup> The Industrial Revolution can be understood as the process of changeover from economies based on agriculture to ones based on industry that occurred during the nineteenth century. It is a familiar landmark in British history, bringing a decisive shift in methods of industrial production, and a distinct process of technological change. See Deane, P. 1996, “The British Industrial Revolution”, in *The Industrial Revolution in National Context: Europe and the USA*, eds. M. Teich & R. Porter, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp.13-35. Deane demonstrates the way, as a result of the Industrial Revolution, the British population moved into a period of exponential growth during the nineteenth century and further that this growth depressed living standards, resulting in a high level of urbanisation, a high mortality rate and low quality of life.

<sup>8</sup> Rugg, J. 1997, “The Origins and Progress of Cemetery Establishment in Britain”, in *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal*, eds. P. Jupp & G. Howarth, Macmillan Press, London, p.105. [hereafter “The Origins and Progress of Cemetery Establishment”].



by the establishment of cemeteries outside cities, demonstrating that the Victorian perspective of death brought about a readjustment from family who helped in the mortuary process to entrepreneurial groups. He clarifies that the changes brought about by Industrial Revolution notions of “efficiency” in the latter half of the nineteenth century was in contrast to the control over burial practised by the Church prior to 1850. By 1884, many of the laws giving control to secular authorities had come into force, indicating that “the era of the Churches’ controlling interest in burial had already passed”.<sup>9</sup> All of these issues, joined with a revival of Christianity brought an attitude that

the living were to have decent, godly lives; the sick were to be cared for; the poor were to be taken into institutions. . . ; the children were to be educated; and the dead were to be respectfully and reverently buried where they would not be disturbed. . . [T]he temporary resting place of a foul, shallow and insecure grave was to be a thing of the past. . . [T]he family grave, like the family house, became a mark of substance. The family united in life, was to remain so even in death. . . And it was not just the grave itself, but the whole comforting ritual of the funeral which helped to soften the pangs of bereavement. Assured that the soul would fly, straight to heaven and eternal bliss; fortified by piety, by prayers, and by good works; the Victorian Celebration of Death developed into a customary frame work which in itself was an easing activity, affording relief from the horror and grief of bereavement.<sup>10</sup>

British mortuary practices had a considerable effect on Australian practices, with the dominant British population emulating the society from which they originated. Duncan Waterson and Sandra Tweedie suggest that “social and class customs and procedures. . . evolved as a result of the interrelationship between the practices in the United Kingdom. . .”<sup>11</sup> Practices concerning interment were carried into the new

<sup>9</sup> Jupp, P. 1997, “Enon Chapel: No Way For The Dead”, in *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal*, eds. P. Jupp & G. Howarth, Macmillan Press, London, pp.90-103. Jupp’s references to “the Church” can be understood as the Church of England.

<sup>10</sup> Stevens Curl, J. 1972, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, p.25-26.

<sup>11</sup> Waterson, D. & Tweedie, S. 1985, “A Study of the Funeral Industry In New South Wales: A Preliminary Report”, in *Essays On Mortality*, eds. M. Crouch & B. Huppau, University of NSW, Kensington, p.124.

society established by the European colonisers and evidence of these attitudes being adhered to even in the heat and difficulties of the Australian bush can be found in nineteenth century Australian writing. Henry Handel Richardson references a long grieving process in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* when Lallie dies. When Mary breaks down over the death of her child, Richard “makes no attempt to soothe or restrain. Well for her that she should weep. . . This physical outlet was her sole means of relief.” He also offers to her that “it is not forever. You. . . we. . . shall see our child again”.<sup>12</sup> Mary continued to remain removed from society months after the death of her child. Cuffy, another child, describes how she would not go on outings with the family “she was still too sorry about Lallie being dead”. He observes that “there always seemed to be someone crying. Aunt Zara came to see them all dressed in black, with black cloths hanging from her bonnet and a prickly dress that scratched. . . This was because she was a ‘widder’. She had a black streak on her hankerchief, too, to cry on, and felt most awfully sorry about writing to Mamma on paper that hadn’t a ‘morning border’ ”.<sup>13</sup> Even many months after Lallie had died, mourning dress was still adhered to. “Mary took two crepe bands from her pocket and slipped them over the children’s white sleeves. . . People of the class they were now dependent on thought so much of funerals and mourning”.<sup>14</sup> Patrick White writes of the funeral of Rose Portion in *Voss*, evidencing nineteenth century ideals, even though Rose is the servant of the family at the burial. She was

buried at the Sand Hills after a day or two had elapsed, and to that burying ground the Bonners drove, in the family carriage and a hired fly. . . The mourners smelled of fresh crepe, supplied by the George Street store. . . The poor, sandy soil soon provided most difficult going, especially for the women, whose heels sank, and whose skirts dragged dreadfully.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Richardson, H.H. 1992, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, Minerva, Victoria, p.662. [hereafter *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney*].

<sup>13</sup> Richardson, H.H. 1992, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, p.695. Written from the point of view of a child, the language is colloquial, however, the suggestion follows Stevens Curl’s assertion of the mourning expectations.

<sup>14</sup> Richardson, H.H. 1992, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, p.703.

<sup>15</sup> White, P. 1960, *Voss*, Penguin Group, London, p.234.

These accounts reveal the practices of the past and the way these ideals were adhered to even in the difficulties of the new country.<sup>16</sup>

It is with the turn of the century that we see the beginnings of change in these rituals. Rather than death becoming more familiar and easily traversed in society, it can be argued that death in the twentieth century became a mystery for which there was no rational explanation. This is despite the experience with death on a massive scale over the last one hundred years when many societies felt the impact of two world wars. It is also despite the concentration of society's gaze on trauma and death in the media on a daily basis. Milton McC.Gatch argues that despite contemporary society having these opportunities to examine death, "because we have had no rationale of death, we have attempted to isolate ourselves from its manifestations".<sup>17</sup>

Geoffrey Gorer, likewise, emphasises how society has imposed an abandonment of these rituals. Writing in the 1960s, he suggests that since the Victorian era Britons "tend to treat mourning as morbid, unhealthy. . . as if it were a weakness, a self-indulgence, a reprehensible bad habit".<sup>18</sup> He argued that this denial of death left contemporary society in the difficult position of being unable to adequately explain death, being unable to integrate the concept within their own value structures. In his study, Gorer points to a pattern of mourning practices that on the surface emulate those of Victorian England. Upon closer examination, only some of the rituals are in evidence and the whole issue is dealt with in a difficult and inarticulate way. It is the mourning practices which have undergone the most change, according to this study. The customs of mourning dress and an abstinence from social activity have "practically disappeared in England".<sup>19</sup> Gorer evidences that "the vast majority hid

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<sup>16</sup> There are many examples of these observations of grief and mourning in the nineteenth century, however, while interesting and appropriate, there is no scope to mention them all in this paper.

<sup>17</sup> McC.Gatch, M. (ed.) 1969, *Death: Meaning and Mortality In Christian Thought and Contemporary Culture*, Seabury Press, New York, p.4. [hereafter *Death: Meaning and Mortality*].

<sup>18</sup> McC.Gatch, M. 1969, *Death: Meaning and Mortality*, p.9.

<sup>19</sup> McC.Gatch, M. 1969, *Death: Meaning and Mortality*, p.10.

their grief and . . . acted ‘as if nothing had happened’ in any situation where they could be observed.”<sup>20</sup> This study “demonstrates that the majority of British people are today without adequate guidance as to how to treat death and bereavement”.<sup>21</sup> Gorer found that at the time of death, religion remained the most common means of offering any kind of explanation for the reason behind the occurrence. This is despite a lack of religious undertaking in many parts of contemporary society. He demonstrates that “it is very rare. . . for a dead body to be disposed of without benefit of clergy”,<sup>22</sup> offering an explanation for this practice which points to the possibilities of the afterlife offered by the Church. John Hick writes of the marked move away from traditional Christian belief. He argues that the

considerable decline within society as a whole, accompanied by a lesser decline within the churches, of the belief in personal immortality clearly reflects the assumption within our culture that we should only believe in what we experience, plus what the accredited sciences certify to us. The after-life falls outside this sphere and is accordingly dismissed as a fantasy of wishful thinking.<sup>23</sup>

What the twentieth century has experienced, therefore, amounts to a rejection of culture, leaving contemporary society in confusion. Instead of following the doctrines of Christianity, people “at most pay lip-service” and undertake to develop their own belief structure. Gorer writes that

[t]oday it would seem to be believed, . . . that sensible rational men and women can keep their mourning under complete control by strength of will or character so that it need be given no public expression, and indulged, if at all, in private, as furtively as if it were an analogue of masturbation.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Gorer, G. 1965, *Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*, The Cresset Press, London, p.51. [hereafter *Death, Grief and Mourning*].

<sup>21</sup> Gorer, G. 1965, *Death, Grief and Mourning*, p.52.

<sup>22</sup> Gorer, G. 1965, *Death, Grief and Mourning*, p.52.

<sup>23</sup> Hick, J. 1976, *Death and Eternal Life*, Harper and Row, New York, p.92. [hereafter *Death and Eternal Life*]. See Freeland, G. 1985, “Death and Australian Civil Religion”, in *Essays on Mortality*, eds. M. Crouch & B. Huppau, University of NSW, Kensington, for a discussion on the changes in emphasis on religion in Australian society.

<sup>24</sup> Gorer, G. 1965, *Death, Grief and Mourning*, p.110.

This suggests that we have become “squeamish” about the certainty and reality of death, pain and mourning. It has become the “pornography of death”, either furtively enjoyed or self-righteously condemned.<sup>25</sup>

Likewise, Phillippe Aries draws attention to the silence surrounding death in modern life. Despite society being familiar with death, it has become “a strange and monstrous thing that nobody dared talk about”.<sup>26</sup> He points to contemporary rituals which stand in contrast to the public death of the past. The distance between death and life was not traditionally perceived as a “radical metamorphosis . . . The idea of absolute negativity, a sudden, irrevocable plunge into an abyss without memory, did not exist.”<sup>27</sup> Therefore, it is the concept of an after-life which is absent from modern rituals, the concept that death is a “passing over”. In the past, society maintained an “attitude that expressed a naive and spontaneous acceptance of destiny and nature”.<sup>28</sup> Aries calls this the “tame death”, a familiar death with structural permanence. He writes that “the ancient attitude in which death is close and familiar yet diminished and desensitised is too different from our own view, in which it is so terrifying that we no longer dare say its name”.<sup>29</sup> He offers an understanding of modern rituals similar to those suggested by Gorer, however, he goes further to evaluate the impact these changes in attitude have brought about. It is the death of the individual, as opposed to the death of those famous or prominent in society, which is being lost by modern society. In contrast to an attitude which he relates to “the death of the Middle Ages”, Aries demonstrates the ways “we moderns” have banished death from daily life.<sup>30</sup> Aries shows us the new death, the invisible death, the “sudden plunge into an abyss without memory”. No longer is the individual death recognised. With death therefore, the identity of society is threatened.

<sup>25</sup> Gorer, G. 1965, *Death, Grief and Mourning*, pp.110-116.

<sup>26</sup> Aries, P. 1981, *The Hour Of Our Death*, p.11.

<sup>27</sup> Aries, P. 1981, *The Hour Of Our Death*, p.22.

<sup>28</sup> Aries, P. 1981, *The Hour Of Our Death*, p.29.

<sup>29</sup> Aries, P. 1981, *The Hour Of Our Death*, p.28.

<sup>30</sup> Aries, P. 1981, *The Hour Of Our Death*, p.5.

Arguably there are several aspects to the modern isolation of death. The wars of the twentieth century have brought about a change in common attitudes towards death. Physical realities of soldiers fighting and dying in distant countries had a profound effect on mortuary practices. Often, the absence of a body for burial or the time required to bring a body 'home' negated the possibility of viewing the body. A need to disguise how the soldiers actually died arose, attempting to shield society from the horrifying reality of death in war and to reinforce notions of clean death and self-sacrifice. Jupp argues that war

alters attitudes to the corpse and to its disposal, and to common interpretations of death, in addition to its economic and political consequences which may order the priorities of life. [It] brings new technology, new values, new opportunities and a shake-up in social mood and order. . . Character - national, sectional, and personal - is moulded and analysed by response to tragedy.<sup>31</sup>

Likewise, Alan Wilkinson argues that a change in attitudes towards Christianity and death came about with two World Wars. Instead of being offered a coherent, consistent structure of grief, society required new explanations. "People were too desperate to look only in a single direction, so they often drew upon a combination of theodicies".<sup>32</sup> Wilkinson further evidences a division created by the isolation of the bereaved society 'at home'. They were "torn between grief and patriotism. Was it unpatriotic to grieve?"<sup>33</sup> Bernd Huppaufl argues that these experiences of war and death offer "still considerable contribution. . . towards the shaping of the self-consciousness of Western societies and. . . their mental fabric".<sup>34</sup> In Australia, he

<sup>31</sup> Jupp, P. 1997, "Death As A Social And Historical Actor", in *The Changing Face Of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal*, eds. P. Jupp & G. Howarth, Macmillan Press, London, pp.1-6. [hereafter "Death As A Social And Historical Actor"].

<sup>32</sup> Wilkinson, A. 1997, "Changing English Attitudes To Death in the Two World Wars", in *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal*, eds. P. Jupp & G. Howarth, Macmillan Press, London, p.150. [hereafter "Changing Attitudes To Death"].

<sup>33</sup> Wilkinson, A. 1997, "Changing English Attitudes To Death", p.157.

<sup>34</sup> Huppaufl, B. 1985, "War and Death: The Experience of the First World War", in *Essays On Mortality*, eds. M. Crouch & B. Huppaufl, University of NSW, Kensington, pp.66. [hereafter "War and Death"].



suggests that a preservation of understandings of Gallipoli and the ANZAC tradition in contemporary society “are seen by many commentators as the core of the national identity”.<sup>35</sup> The movie, *Gallipoli*, epitomises these perceptions, offering a “desire for empathy and national identification. . .”<sup>36</sup> It is a perception which continues to structure Australian society’s understanding of death and its relation to the national identity.<sup>37</sup>

A further aspect lies in the age of “medicalization” as the starting point of these changes to mortuary practices. The twentieth century brought new standards of health and understanding of human illness due to an expansion of the medical profession. Peter Jupp suggests that an attitude now persists that “death is caused not by ‘old age’ but by disease and is, therefore and theoretically, controllable”.<sup>38</sup> The idea behind the need to understand the ‘cause’ of death lies in the desire to escape the inevitable state. While this cannot actually be done, the barriers can be pushed back. As Bauman suggests, it has become such that “one does not just die; one dies of a disease or of murder. I can do nothing to defy mortality. But I can do quite a lot to avoid a blood clot or lung cancer”.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, in the event of death, the ‘cause’ must be found. The ‘why?’ must be answered and explained so that it can be avoided in the future. In this way, Lindsay Prior suggests that causes of death have come under scrutiny, with the result that an illusion of ‘control’ has been generated.<sup>40</sup> It is a process which has led to what Aries calls “the concealment of death by illness and the establishment of the lie around the dying man”.<sup>41</sup> He argues that this is furthered by notions of dirtiness and indecency in the physical realities of the dying human

<sup>35</sup> Huppauf, B. 1985, “War and Death”, p.66.

<sup>36</sup> Huppauf, B. 1985, “War and Death”, p.66.

<sup>37</sup> For further discussions on the same theme see D’Alton, P. 1997, “Prayers To Broken Stones: War and Death In Australia”, in *The Unknown Country: Death in Australia, Britain and the USA*, eds. K. Charmaz, G. Howarth, & A. Kellehear, Macmillan Press, London.

<sup>38</sup> Jupp, P. 1997, “Death As A Social And Historical Actor”, p.14.

<sup>39</sup> Bauman, Z. 1992, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, p.138.

<sup>40</sup> Prior, L. 1989, *The Social organisation Of Death: Medical Discourse and Social Practices in Belfast*, Macmillan Press, Basingstoke. Prior extensively evaluates this aspect of modern death, concluding that the medical profession has become an institution with the power to alter society’s approach to such fundamental occurrences as death.

<sup>41</sup> Aries, P. 1981, *The Hour Of Our Death*, p.568.

body. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, “death ceases to be always seen as beautiful and sometimes is even depicted as disgusting. It has become a nauseating spectacle”.<sup>42</sup> It is this new image of death which has continued through the twentieth century, that of the “ugly and hidden death”. Particularly in the second half of this century the “promiscuity of disease” is removed from the house to the hospital.<sup>43</sup> “Although it is not always admitted, the hospital has offered families a place where they can hide the unseemly invalid whom neither the world nor they can endure”.<sup>44</sup> As a result of this removal, few people actually die at home in contemporary society, and the practice of embalming has fallen to the undertaker. In this way, the undertaker has become a replacement for the family who in the past ‘dressed’ the body for burial. This passing of mortuary rites is largely grounded in contemporary society being unwilling to address the “ritually unclean and physically distasteful work of disposing of the dead in a manner satisfying to the living”.<sup>45</sup> Instead what the living like to see is a professionally embalmed body which provides an “‘informal’ death mask which allows the living to look at what they want to see in death: an image of temporary sleep”.<sup>46</sup> Hick also suggests that the death of a loved one or family member is removed from everyday life. The notion of death kept out of sight is designed to cause as little disruption to the family’s life as possible. This has become an ideological part of our mortuary customs, further removing modern society from the physical actualities of death. This removal has offered an opportunity for the institutional structure surrounding death to become powerful as individuals prepare for ‘after’ death. “Over time, support for the bereaved family has shifted from neighbour, carpenter and village priest to medical personnel, funeral directors and local authority crematoria.”<sup>47</sup> Glennys Howarth closely examines these practices, concluding that a period of commercialisation of death in the nineteenth century led to “dying and disposal mores, death, burial and the funeral [being]

<sup>42</sup> Aries, P. 1981, *The Hour Of Our Death*, p.569.

<sup>43</sup> Aries, P. 1981, *The Hour of Our Death*, p.570.

<sup>44</sup> Aries, P. 1981, *The Hour of Our Death*, p.571.

<sup>45</sup> McC.Gatch, M. 1969, *Death: Meaning and Mortality*, p.13.

<sup>46</sup> McC.Gatch, M. 1969, *Death: Meaning and Mortality*, p.13.

<sup>47</sup> Jupp, P. 1997, “Death As A Social And Historical Actor”, pp.1-15.

allocated as the concerns of a small number of experts”.<sup>48</sup> Like Aries and Hick, she points to the location of the hospital as the ‘place’ for the dying, exaggerating the division between the living and the dead. This development then required the expertise of undertakers “to handle the practical necessities associated with preparing the corpse and organising the rituals which accompany its disposal”.<sup>49</sup> This combination of the medical profession and undertakers have ultimately “exposed death to science”, thereby providing an explanation modern society can understand. Likewise, Hick suggests that “this institutionalisation of death, whilst it brings the resources of medical science to bear in aid of the dying, must also have the effect of reinforcing our cultural taboo upon death”.<sup>50</sup>

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The cultural unease surrounding the dead body was apparent following Hamish’s death. At no stage were we, the family, ‘allowed’ to view his remains. An inherent horror of his decomposed body was palpable when the bodies were found. The actuality of decomposure after lying for three weeks in the bush was ‘hidden’ from us, believing it would cause less pain if we ‘remembered him as he was’. When we took his belongings to the funeral home the night before the funeral, we were presented with a closed coffin, a neat, clean box concealing “the unclean and physically distasteful work” now relegated to the undertaker.<sup>51</sup> The taboo remained in place. This regulation of death was sustained discursively: at no time did the media state anything about the bodies. Hamish was brought to us as the hero who had defied the bush. His dead body remained absent from the story, almost an irrelevant afterthought for all except his family. In this way, the media offers society reassurance of twentieth century mortuary practices. When Princess Diana died in 1997, *Who* magazine described how she was laid out in Kensington Palace for her

<sup>48</sup> Howarth, G. 1997, “Professionalising The Funeral Industry”, p.132.

<sup>49</sup> Howarth, G. 1997, “Professionalising The Funeral Industry”, p.132.

<sup>50</sup> Hick, J. 1976, *Death and Eternal Life*, p.85.

<sup>51</sup> McC.Gatch, M. 1969, *Death: Meaning and Mortality*, p.13.

sons to view her before the funeral. “[T]he princess, her face unscarred by the crash, had been laid out in a formal black coatdress, bought weeks earlier and never worn. . . She looked wrenchingly lovely.”<sup>52</sup> The emphasis is on the removal of all actualities of death. She was the perfect example of “the image of temporary sleep”. The “shock” suicide of rock singer Michael Hutchence of the band INXS became a media exercise in revealing the ‘truth’ about death. Extraordinary coverage was seen in tabloids and magazines as Australia waited breathlessly for the answer to the questions of how and why he died. It was to the medical institution that society turned. There had to be a ‘reason’. The disgust over the reality of the body was quickly brushed over. Discussion of Hutchence’s body “hanging from the self-closing mechanism of the door” to his hotel room became the subject of furtive rumours and hushed discussion.<sup>53</sup> Publicly, society viewed a respectful, dignified funeral broadcast to the nation.

It is in contemporary rituals surrounding death that we see how society remains isolated from what Zygmunt Bauman sees as “the preordained transitoriness of life”.<sup>54</sup> With the twentieth century came notions of ‘control’ over life through medicalisation, negating the need for a religious explanation of the meaning required to live. Society came to understand illness and war as the reasons for death; a “religious antidote” when the meaning of life seemed to be irrelevant, relegated to a time when “everything stayed as it was and everyone knew their place reserved for him or her. . . Life was not in the hands of the living. Life was *not a task*. Life *just was*”.<sup>55</sup> As humanity reached the age of ‘modernity’, the desire to “lift transient things above the mire of transience” required particular things to become durable. “Death’s victory would then not be complete”.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Lambert, P. 1997, “Diana: The Farewell”, in *Who Weekly, Commemorative Issue*, September 22, 1997, p.32.

<sup>53</sup> Casey, M. 1997, “Hutchence: Diary of His Final Days”, in *The Daily Telegraph: Insight*, Saturday, December 13, 1997, pp.28-30.

<sup>54</sup> Bauman, Z. 1992, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, p.89.

<sup>55</sup> Bauman, Z. 1992, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, p.92. Bauman’s italics.

<sup>56</sup> Bauman, Z. 1992, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, p.94.

Despite an evolution of death over the past two centuries which has emulated British practices, it can be argued that within these practices, there is an Australian way of death. Allan Kellehear and Ian Anderson argue that in Australia, “there is an officially endorsed set of cultural images of death”.<sup>57</sup> These, they suggest, correspond with “powerful, national self-images of ‘being Australian’”.<sup>58</sup> When we return to the image of the ‘Australian Legend’, it can be argued that the familiarity of death in the outback leant an indifference to death and a characterisation of a ‘bushman’s’ life as battling against nature,

doing battle, in fact warring, with the wild forces of an untamed land. The unpredictability of the weather. . . or of indigenous people. . . were sources of death. So too were the predictable responses of colonial authority, and the unforgiving vast distances of the country which swallowed the luckless casual wanderer as greedily as it did the experienced explorer.<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, a history of natural disasters have brought confrontation with death on a large scale. Beverley Raphael suggests that Australian experiences of natural disasters have led to an understanding of death as incorporated in the natural order of things.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, she suggests that in contemporary society, the media have played a considerable role in shaping an Australian awareness and understanding of death. “Death by disaster is brought to the living room, with its directness, randomness and massive nature”.<sup>61</sup> It is public awareness which is called for. Grieving families are portrayed,

memorial ceremonies are encouraged, become public statements and events, and are presented as appropriate communal responses to the deaths and losses that have

<sup>57</sup> Kellehear, A. & Anderson, I. 1997, “Death In The Country of Matilda”, in *The Unknown Country: Death In Australia, Britain and the USA*, eds. K. Charmaz, G. Howarth, & A. Kellehear, Macmillan Press, London, p.1. [hereafter “Death In The Country Of Matilda”].

<sup>58</sup> Kellehear, A. & Anderson, I. 1997, “Death In The Country of Matilda”, p.1.

<sup>59</sup> Kellehear, A. & Anderson, I. 1997, “Death In The Country of Matilda”, p.3.

<sup>60</sup> Raphael, B. 1997, “Death and The Great Australian Disaster”, in *The Unknown Country: Death In Australia, Britain and the USA*, eds. K. Charmaz, G. Howarth, & A. Kellehear, Macmillan Press, London, p.72. [hereafter “Death and The Great Australian Disaster”].

<sup>61</sup> Raphael, B. 1997, “Death and The Great Australian Disaster”, p.76.

occurred. In this way, the public nature of disaster deaths and the grief accompanying them have provided foci for awareness of those realities of death and grief. . .<sup>62</sup>

It is the nature of public ceremonies which is important. McC.Gatch argues that public ceremonies “function periodically to integrate the whole community with its conflicting symbols and its opposing, autonomous churches and associations”.<sup>63</sup> By incorporating the whole of society, the important understanding of the sacrifice of the individual for the general good is maintained. This action reinforces an understanding that the immense numbers killed as a result of the wars this century have offered themselves in a meaningful way and have received due rewards for the sacrifice. “The dead are held before the living as an example, and the living are urged to offer themselves as sacrifices for the ideals of the entire people”.<sup>64</sup>

Kamerman illustrates the function of group practices and rites. He writes

it is a symbol of unity in the face of the diverse groups and diverse interests. . . of life. It is also a transcendence of death, because a person can confront fears with a system of sacred beliefs about death. The ceremonies allow people to relive a time when national unity was at its strongest. . .<sup>65</sup>

In these situations an individual death is claimed as a ‘public’ death. In the place of the anonymous death which has become the norm in the twentieth century, a “disaster death” becomes an event which can be claimed to symbolise society’s ideals and belief structures. Aries suggests that only when “an accident so sudden and absurd [occurs may we] suspend the usual prohibitions”.<sup>66</sup> Likewise, Kamerman refers to the importance of mourning public figures. He suggests that these members

<sup>62</sup> Raphael, B. 1997, “Death and The Great Australian Disaster”, p.48.

<sup>63</sup> McC.Gatch, M. 1969, *Death: Meaning and Mortality*, p.14.

<sup>64</sup> McC.Gatch, M. 1969, *Death: Meaning and Mortality*, p.14.

<sup>65</sup> Kamerman, J.B. 1988, *Death In The Midst Of Life: Social and Cultural Influences On Death, Grief and Mourning*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, p.83. Kamerman’s italics. [hereafter *Death In The Midst Of Life*]. While Kamerman is referring to the American ‘Memorial Day’, this understanding of public ceremonies, including war memorials can be applied to the example of Australia.

<sup>66</sup> Aries, P. 1981, *The Hour Of Our Death*, p.11.



of society remain a “*collective representation*, a symbol of the values and a reflection of the social structures of society”.<sup>67</sup> In this way, to ensure ‘immortality’ of the nation, a death must not threaten the survival of society. “It is important to reassert the viability of the group, both for the group’s sake and for each member’s sake”.<sup>68</sup> W. Lloyd writes of the way public deaths function as a means of reinforcing belief in the cultural structures. He writes “the deaths of such men also become powerful sacred symbols which organise, direct, and constantly revive the collective ideals of the community and the nation”,<sup>69</sup> hence society can guard against deaths which threaten the system of meanings. Lesley Fitzpatrick points to art as the representation of the ‘good death’ in Australia. Images of death in artworks can offer an understanding of Australian death. Unlike European scenes of deathbeds and religious ceremonies, Australian deaths are characterised by a lack of “control over the manner and timing of their deaths”.<sup>70</sup> Fitzpatrick suggests that artworks record “images of men who die confronting the law or the bush rather than the more ordinary encounters with death. Death is transformed from an individual experience to a cultural myth”.<sup>71</sup> If we accept cultural fantasies as a “crucial process in linking the experience of mortality with a culture’s understanding of the fundamental purpose of life”,<sup>72</sup> then we can see how cultural constructions of death are based on “social and historical factors that are modified by perceptions and understandings of the ultimate nature of mortality”.<sup>73</sup> In Australia it is the ideal of the ‘Australian Legend’ which organises the experience of mortality and shapes society’s understanding of the “fundamental purpose of life”.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Kamerman, J.B. 1988, *Death In The Midst Of Life*, p.83. Kamerman’s italics.

<sup>68</sup> Kamerman, J.B. 1988, *Death In The Midst Of Life*, p.83.

<sup>69</sup> Warner, W. Lloyd, 1962, *American Life: Dream and Reality*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p.34.

<sup>70</sup> Fitzpatrick, L. 1997, “Secular, Savage and Solitary: Death in Australian Painting”, in *The Unknown Country: Death in Australia, Britain and the USA*, eds. K. Charmaz, G. Howarth & A. Kellehear, Macmillan Press, London. p.26. [hereafter “Secular, Savage and Solitary”].

<sup>71</sup> Fitzpatrick, L. 1997, “Secular, Savage and Solitary”, p.26.

<sup>72</sup> Fitzpatrick, L. 1997, “Secular, Savage and Solitary”, p.26.

<sup>73</sup> Fitzpatrick, L. 1997, “Secular, Savage and Solitary”, p.27.

<sup>74</sup> Fitzpatrick, L. 1997, “Secular, Savage and Solitary”, p.26.

Hamish's death illustrates the way these cultural constructions come into play to uphold the immortality of the nation. His funeral took on the values of the community, the ceremony allowing a time for a national unity to be achieved. By emphasising Hamish as the embodiment of the bushman', his death became an opportunity to provide a symbol of unity to the community. Hinch's reference to the explorers, Burke and Wills, and the comparison between their deaths and Hamish's opened possibilities for society to relive the fantasy of white Australian history and identity. Burke and Wills died confronting the bush, as did Hamish.<sup>75</sup> It was not an ordinary encounter with death. Cultural fantasies stepped in to structure the accident. It was a process which echoed the memories of soldiers who died for their country in war; Hamish was the sacrifice to the bush for the good of the nation. This cultural construction could be seen on the day of Hamish's funeral. The numbers of people; the nature of the funeral procession; the town stopped to watch and remember the passing of this individual. Through the media, the community had come to understand this death as that of the 'Australian Legend', confronting nature and being sacrificed for the nation. They stopped to pay tribute to that struggle.

'Disaster deaths' are commonly claimed for collective practices by the Australian media. On Wednesday, July 30, 1997, at 11.37 pm the quiet of Thredbo Alpine Village in NSW's Snowy Mountains was shattered by a landslide which swept away Carinya and Bimbadeen Lodges. Newspaper headlines and emergency reports brought news to a shocked nation that 23 people were buried in the piles of concrete and earth. Australia united in support of what came to be known as "The Thredbo Disaster".<sup>76</sup> The media brought immediate information into our living rooms as we waited breathlessly for word on whether there would be survivors. It became a stand-off with a mountain of rubble; a fight against the ever-threatening natural disaster; a race against the turning weather. When the only survivor, Stuart Diver,

<sup>75</sup> For accounts of the story of Burke and Wills see Bonyhady, T. 1991, *Burke and Wills: From Melbourne to Myth*, David Ell Press, Sydney; and Clune, F. 1965, *Dig: The Tragic Story of the Burke and Wills Expedition*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney.

<sup>76</sup> "The Thredbo Disaster", in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Saturday, August 2, 1997, pp.4-9.

was discovered the media began a 48-hour vigil of coverage relayed to Australia. As the “nation prayed for the victims” and Thredbo “united in despair”,<sup>77</sup> Stuart Diver became the “miracle of Thredbo”.<sup>78</sup> With values of courage, determination and hope, he became the image of the ‘real’ Australian. In a moment when it seemed the deaths of these people were without explanation, without meaning and out of our control, a survivor against all odds offered the opportunity to reclaim unity against the dangers of the Australian bush. With headlines such as “so sudden and absurd”, and “the nation grieves”, it became a moment when the nation gained strength as the tragedy offered an opportunity to reunite the people, to reassert the viability of the group.

It is acceptable to publicly mourn such deaths because they uphold the code of nationalism and reinforce the need to continue the ‘war’ against the bush. As suggested by Kamerman, the deaths, and the rituals celebrating those deaths, were claimed as a “*collective representation*, a symbol of the values and a reflection of the social structures of society”.<sup>79</sup> The accident of October 1993, was portrayed in a familiar way; reinforcing an understanding of the bushman’s life as a war against nature; of Australia as an unforgiving country swallowing the unwary traveller. In this way, Hamish’s death was claimed as an opportunity to reinforce these white Australian values and to uphold a dominant identity.

While the framework which used to support a way of understanding and speaking about death has gone, ‘public’ deaths such as that of October 1993, continue to provide a point of unity and a means of restating national ideals. The rituals that followed this accident provided the means to symbolically encode Scott’s and Hamish’s deaths as well as their lives, and created an opportunity to offer society a coherent identity within a national structure. If life is, as Bauman suggests, only

<sup>77</sup> “The Thredbo Disaster”, in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Saturday, August 2, 1997, pp.4-9.

<sup>78</sup> Sheather, M. 1997, “The Miracle Of Thredbo”, in *The Australian Women’s Weekly*, September, 1997, pp.4-11.

<sup>79</sup> Kamerman, J.B. 1988, *Death In The Midst Of Life*, p.83.

validated by death, then the permanence of Hamish's resting place plays a part in this story. Following the shift in attitudes towards death in contemporary society, this universal event has become realised in the creation of 'place'. We see this in the rural Australian cemetery which continues to lay claim to permanence. Ultimately, it is this 'place'; the cemetery, which, in rural Australia, maintains cultural coherency by inserting a past into the Australian landscape. The cemetery, I would argue, is the symbol for a continuity of existence, both individual and that of the nation. The very durability of the cemetery in rural communities, of the process of interring bodies in the landscape, offers a means of overcoming death and in this way, stands against wider social shifts in mourning rituals in the twentieth century. In these rural Australian communities we continue to see mourning rituals organising social relations in ways that are specific to the re-enactment of the white Australian myths of nation.

## THE CEMETERY

*Since the last ritual of Hamish's life, the Forbes Cemetery has become a landscape less unknown. It is a place which emphasises a particular perception of the Australian bush. There is no green grass, nor ancient green trees that stand like quiet sentinels in American movies. It is too hot to hold grave-side funerals and when a burial takes place a canopy is erected over the grave to shelter the family from the heat. It is not romantic in a traditional British Victorian sense. Standing at the gate, memories of Henry Lawson's "The Union Buries Its Dead"<sup>1</sup> come easily. The heat is dazzling, carrying a weight that is indescribable to someone not Australian. There is a sense that little has changed since its early days, giving the cemetery a sense of permanence. Not only does it reach back to the forgotten generations who pioneered the move west of Bathurst and who rushed in search of gold in the 1860s, today's generations have a part in the life of this cemetery. Unlike the new lawn cemeteries appearing in newer towns and less traditional centres, the cemetery attempts to hold to a long-established European tradition. The segregated areas of religious denominations still attract their followers. The sweep of hillside is punctuated with many old style headstones and crypts; the glare of clean, white marble worn smooth by the elements contrasting with the rusted fences; headless avenging angels with their swords, and the broken columns of children's short lives. To the east the cemetery overlooks the town, like a silent reminder of its European history. To the west, a long hill rises to the sky. Sometimes the hill is a blaze of canola flowers, sometimes the green of waving wheat. There are no trees save a few old gums at the apex of the hill. It stands as a tribute to the Australian farmer, to the fight to dominate the Australian bush.*

*I have wandered among these graves many times since the passing of my brother. It is a place which has become as familiar as any other and I have come to maintain a pattern within each visit. It is a ritual in itself. Hamish has been buried on the extreme western side of the cemetery in the Presbyterian portion.*

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<sup>1</sup> Lawson, H. 1892-94, "The Union Buries Its Dead", in *Henry Lawson*, ed. B. Kiernan, University of Queensland Press, Queensland, 1976, p.131.

*Few people still bury family members in this section so the fresh white paint on the fence around his grave is a sharp contrast to those beside it. My grandparents have maintained a garden around the graveside so it is a little oasis of green in a dry and otherwise inhospitable environment. The grave is overshadowed by a towering Kurrajong tree, one of the biggest I have ever seen. My grandmother has always loved this tree and wants to be buried near it. This is why Hamish is here. We all have plots within a family grave so we can eventually be together.*

*First I wander to the grave of the Hildred family. It is not in our section so I weave among the old graves, always noting the dates with interest. Many are around the turn of the century; the older ones in the other direction. The fences are in disrepair and many of the headstones have fallen. There are also large spaces between the graves; the result of a fire which swept through the cemetery in the early 1900s. All wooden markers were destroyed, along with the only burial records which were housed in a shed in the cemetery.<sup>2</sup>*

*The Hildreds are in a newer section. The expanse of black granite covering their graves is a little foreboding, emphasising the immensity of the tragedy. It is impossible to stand and contemplate this grave without feeling the implications for the life of the one left. In 1979, Jeanette waved goodbye to her family as they set off to Narromine. Brett was playing football and Allan, Simon and Melissa were going along for the ride. They never came home. A tragic car accident on the Newell highway took them out of Jeanette's life forever. She was left with no-one. They were buried in the Forbes cemetery so they could be close to her. There was never any question of where they would be. Forbes was home.<sup>3</sup>*

*From this grave I visit my great grandmother's grave. The Girdham family lie in a long line which emphasises their ties to the town. Gwendoline Girdham was my great grandmother. She was born in Grenfell to Ellen Sophia Russell, who lies beside her. Sophia's life was a complex mystery which hasn't become clear even in the years following her death. Sophia was married to a landowner in Grenfell.*

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<sup>2</sup> *The History of FORBES, New South Wales, Australia*, Forbes Shire Council and Local History Book Committee, Forbes, pp.175-178.

<sup>3</sup> The narrative of these events is drawn from interviews with Jeanette Hildred.



*She bore four children, the youngest being Gwendoline. In 1908 she took her youngest child, having made sure the other children were old enough to look after themselves, and disappeared. She spent many years working in pubs in western towns while sending Gwendoline to a convent in Sydney. Gwendoline believed for much of her life that she was illegitimate. It wasn't until she was 65, when she needed a birth certificate, that the name Russell was revealed to her, along with the discovery of three siblings. To this day the family has no real idea of why Sophia left. She died soon after Gwen found her real identity. All she ever said was "God, I hated him". The answers to the many questions we have she took to her grave.*

*Gwendoline was married to Horace Girdham, a member of a large family in Forbes. Today most of them lie in this section of the cemetery. Beside Horace and Gwen we find Snow Edwards, married to Gladys Girdham, and their son Desmond. Beside them lies Alice and Albie. Then Ellison and Amy, Jack and Lillian and their daughter Elsie, and finally their parents Sarah and Joseph Girdham.*

*From this group I visit Joseph Girdham's parents, John Woodliffe Girdham and Bridget Connell. John Woodliffe Girdham was a significant figure in the early days of Forbes. Born in Boston Lincolnshire in England in 1835, he is one of the pioneers to first come to Forbes. For a long time his grave was unmarked. Only recently my grandparents erected a headstone on his grave. To the south of this grave there is an expanse of ground, although mostly the 'grass' is made up of weeds if anything grows at all. This is one of the areas where the fire damaged a great deal and most of the graves are unmarked. There is little means to find out who is buried there. New graves are not permitted in this section. Out in the middle of this grassy area stands an old sandstone headstone. It is very small and worn and signifies the passing of Bridget Girdham, John Woodliffe Girdham's first wife and the mother of Joseph. Bridget died at the age of 22 in a fire in their home in 1863. This is the oldest grave from our family in the cemetery.<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> The narrative of this family history is drawn from interviews with Joyce Wallace. See also *The History of FORBES, NSW, Australia*, Forbes Shire Council, 1997, p.576.

*This walk has become a ritual which reinforces an understanding of my family and my connection to this town. It establishes my own sense of belonging. It is the reason why my brother could not have been buried anywhere else.*

## Chapter 2:2

# *INSCRIBING THE LAND*

The cemetery in rural Australia is a space which symbolises the system of meanings surrounding identity and notions of belonging. This space has taken on meaning that steps outside the 'modern death', coming to represent something more than a place of disposal of the dead. Jon Davies argues that not only do cemeteries and burial rites maintain social tradition and convention, but that language and social processes have arisen out of our ancestors' attempts to understand death and to provide their dead with appropriate forms of farewell. He suggests that it is through these processes surrounding death that our society creates a past, present and future for itself; in turn reinforcing the interdependence of the living and the dead. In Australia, we place the dead in cemeteries and set them about with symbols of their new status. By engaging in this action, the graveyard becomes a symbol of belief and ritual. This symbol provides a means of understanding death, offering hope of immortality, a means of maintaining social tradition and convention, and serving as a place of disposal. McC.Gatch suggests that this 'place' provides a "firm and fixed social place...where the disturbed sentiments of human beings about their loved dead can settle and find peace and certainty".<sup>1</sup> The cemetery, therefore, symbolises the settled status of the dead.

Like Davies, Richard Meyer suggests that "cemeteries are far more than merely elements of space sectioned off and set aside for the burial of the dead: they are, in effect, cultural texts, there to be read and appreciated".<sup>2</sup> A cemetery not only documents the development and growth of a community, nor do they only hold special significance for individuals and communities through personal attachment

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<sup>1</sup> McC.Gatch, M. 1969, *Death: Meaning and Mortality*, p.12.

<sup>2</sup> Meyer, R.E. 1993, "Strangers In A Strange Land: Ethnic Cemeteries In America", in *Ethnicity and the American Cemetery*, ed. R. Meyer, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, Ohio, p.3. [hereafter "Strangers In A Strange Land"].

and sentiment.<sup>3</sup> Most importantly, a cemetery highlights the ongoing tension of an evolving culture. Kenneth Jackson writes that “cemeteries fostered a sense of identity and stability in a new country characterised by change”.<sup>4</sup> While Jackson is referring to immigrants in America, the nature of Australia as a ‘new’ country colonised by a European-based population can be argued to have similar consequences. The Forbes Cemetery emphasises a desire to maintain a cultural continuity with the European background, immediately noticeable in the monument styles and religious motifs and language used on headstones. Meyer suggests that “the tendency to display visible . . . identifiers may be as much inspired by a desire for revival of cultural traits as retention of them”.<sup>5</sup> He points out that these spaces set out for interment of the dead provide an intensive focal point for cultural life, and provide insights into the “trends and values of contemporary society”.<sup>6</sup>

The current Forbes Town Cemetery has existed since 1862 when it became clear that burials in the area were increasing and burials on outlying properties became inappropriate for large numbers of townspeople.<sup>7</sup> Within the cemetery, the European culture from which a large majority of the town descended is readily apparent. The traditions, motifs and remembrances rest on a strong Victorian British tradition forming a particular picture of Australian culture, history and religiosity. The largest denominational areas are the Church of England and Catholic portions, which indicates that a majority of Forbes’ early pioneers were of English and Irish origin. However, a number of French settlers can be found in the Catholic section

<sup>3</sup> Beadon, M. “Cemeteries”, *Policy Paper - Cemeteries*, National Trust of Australia and the Forbes Advocate - unpublished. pp.1-12.

<sup>4</sup> Jackson, K.T & Vergara, C.J. (eds.) 1989, *Silent Cities: The Evolution of the American Cemetery*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, p.60.

<sup>5</sup> Meyer, R.E. 1993, “Strangers In A Strange Land”, p.4.

<sup>6</sup> Meyer, R.E. 1993, “Strangers In A Strange Land”, p.11.

<sup>7</sup> A previous cemetery was in existence prior to the establishment of the current town cemetery in 1862. The graves are largely early pioneers who died prior to that date. The current Forbes Town Cemetery can be found on the Bogan Gate road, Forbes NSW. The first burials were Minnie Fisher who died on 1 July 1862 and was buried in the Jewish portion, and John Charles Gunn who died on 2 July 1862. More information on the Forbes Cemetery can be found in *The History of FORBES, NSW, Australia*, Forbes Shire Council, Forbes, 1997.

and the Presbyterian portion reveals many Scottish names. An unusual feature can be seen in the small Jewish section. According to local historians, “Forbes had the first synagogue outside Sydney....It is also said that many Chinese miners were buried in the cemetery but their bodies were removed and returned to China, or perhaps elsewhere in Australia”.<sup>8</sup> The cemetery also emphasises the early European history of Forbes by providing links with early pioneers. Many of the significant individuals and families involved in the development of the town have large monuments erected in their honour. Significant names from more well-known Australian history are also buried in the cemetery. Rebecca Shields, niece of Captain James Cook; Kate Foster, the sister of the outlaw Ned Kelly and the bushranger Ben Hall provide something of a tourist attraction.<sup>9</sup> Beyond the continuity of time, culture and place, this cemetery highlights the way this ‘space’ is a continuing part of a European-based Australian culture, past and present.

John Chapman argues that there is a relationship between permanent burial of the dead and land tenure - something that the European colonisers in Australia have fostered. In terms of a cemetery, the prominence of monuments in a landscape provides a stronger link to the ancestral world. The more a site is used or occupied, the stronger the place-values which attach to that place. He suggests that burials support land claims in situations where a traditional, impermanent disposal of the dead was once in place. “There would appear to be a relationship between the use of permanent burials and land tenure, as well as a relationship between attitudes to the body and the way it is disposed of”.<sup>10</sup> From this approach, the cemetery has become a place inscribed with meaning offering a permanent hold on a landscape previously without meaning to the European colonisers. It is this formation of a ‘place’ which gives rise to the idea of place-value, or the “nexus of stored meaning of past

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<sup>8</sup> Lacey, J. “Local Studies in Social Studies - Cemetery Survey”, Unpublished paper, p.8.

<sup>9</sup> Lacey, J. “Local Studies in Social Studies - Cemetery Survey”, Unpublished paper, pp.1-24. There is still some dispute over Rebecca Shields’ connection to Captain Cook.

activities and traditional usage associated with a significant place.... These notions which link time and place are basic to the development of a socially meaningful landscape".<sup>11</sup> While the land itself could not be changed to represent the culture of the colonisers, the new-comers began a process of ritually inscribing the land. As suggested earlier, literary writers "began the sentimental and imaginative appropriation of the land, then urban progressives pursued it rationally through social. . . planning".<sup>12</sup> Tom Griffiths argues that it was appropriation of the bush which offered a means of possessing the land. He suggests that

[p]astoralism emerged as a favoured form of possession, one supremely adapted to claiming the open spaces of Australia, but one that also offered a balance between nature and civilisation, between country and town. There was in this period an advocacy of both nature and nation.<sup>13</sup>

Following on from the literary nationalism of the 1890s which posited the 'bushman' as the emerging 'real' Australian, the early twentieth century brought "institutional efforts [to] identify, create or preserve hallowed ground, to define a local geography of the past".<sup>14</sup> This attitude emphasised a need for reinforcement of codes and customs; rituals of place. Official attempts to mark out Australia's past by appropriating the land is nowhere more apparent than in monuments to people. As Griffiths argues, "[p]lanting a body was a more sacred appropriation of land than was planting a flag".<sup>15</sup> It is a process of sinking 'roots' in a place, or re-inscribing the land with the values of a new society.

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<sup>10</sup> Chapman, J. 1994, "The Living, The Dead and Ancestors: Time, Life Cycles and The Mortuary Domain", in *Ritual and Remembrance: Responses To Death In Human Societies*, ed. J. Davies, Sheffield Academic Press, England, p.47. [hereafter "The Living, The Dead and Ancestors"].

<sup>11</sup> Chapman, J. 1994, "The Living, The Dead and Ancestors", p.53.

<sup>12</sup> Griffiths, T. 1996, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, p.150. [hereafter *Hunters and Collectors*].

<sup>13</sup> Griffiths, T. 1996, *Hunters and Collectors*, p.150.

<sup>14</sup> Griffiths, T. 1996, *Hunters and Collectors*, p.150.

<sup>15</sup> Griffiths, T. 1996, *Hunters and Collectors*, p.157.



The establishment of a cemetery is an effective way of symbolising the claim a society makes on that landscape. By inserting the important remains of ancestors, value is given to that place. My own pride in my family's place in the Forbes Cemetery - a long history of attachment to Forbes - emphasises this point. This place becomes symbolic of 'home'. Value is given to this place because my ancestors have been inserted into this ground. It symbolises my own claim on the landscape. It is a belief system rarely acknowledged but in existence. The media articulated this desire when Jaidyn Leskie of Moe, Victoria, was buried. Jaidyn's parents fought over where he was to be interred, each believing he "belonged" with different parts of the family. The concern for the funeral arrangements became a story of immense national interest. Carmel Egan summed it up by writing

*the feuding. . . clans will lay tragic toddler Jaidyn to rest on Wednesday in the graveyard of an abandoned coal mining town. It is not Moe, the small Victorian town where Jaidyn Leskie lived and died. It is not Sale, where his paternal relatives live. It is neither here nor there. It is Yallourn, a town where the residents were forced out. . . to make way for expansion of an open-cut coal mine in 1977. The cemetery is on a hill overlooking the smoke stacks and mines. . . It is a sad compromise.*<sup>16</sup>

This emphasis on where Jaidyn would be buried emphasises the Australian concern for possession of the land. Jaidyn was slipping outside the continual process of ritually inscribing the land. The future of his family was not ensured. He was not 'home'. Instead he was "Laid To Rest In No-Man's Land".<sup>17</sup>

In 1997, when Martin Bryant gunned down 35 people in the heritage area of Port Arthur, Tasmania, the world stopped to watch. The incident stands as the worst

<sup>16</sup> Egan, C. 1998, "Feuding Parents Compromise on Jaidyn's Burial: Laid To Rest In no-Man's Land", in *The Daily Telegraph*, Friday, January 9, 1998, Sydney, p.7. [hereafter "Feuding Parents Compromise"].

<sup>17</sup> Egan, C. 1998, "Feuding Parents Compromise", p.7.

civilian shooting massacre by a lone gunman in world history. Bryant walked into the Broad Arrow Cafe at the site of Australia's most famous convict prison, pulled a rifle from a bag and started firing indiscriminately. What followed was a media exercise in articulating the discourses surrounding death and those of the Australian nation. Rather than leave Port Arthur as "a place which is . . . a memorial to the viciousness, the wickedness, the evil that man can exist upon man",<sup>18</sup> the site became one through which to unite the nation. Following a memorial service on the site of the ruined cathedral at Port Arthur, five thousand Tasmanians came to mourn. At the same time, the whole nation stopped for a minute of silence to honour the passing of so many. What had been a moment of destruction, now became one through which we could unite. One mourner at the memorial service said, "We've got to start out again, get back on a level playing field and not let this event take away what's ours - not give it too much power".<sup>19</sup> Hadn't the people who died been taken away? What was this event taking away from the community? Furthermore, How could this site be viewed as one which has lost its innocence through this shooting? Port Arthur was the site of one of the most harsh and dreadful prisons of the Australian colony. Prior to that particular history, who can say what atrocities were committed in ridding the area of its Aboriginal population. These stories, however, have been erased from view. The green lawns and crumbling ruins of Port Arthur today are reminiscent of England. It is a landscape which had been reclaimed from the past and reinscribed with ideals of the mythical white Australian history. The media reinforced the view of Port Arthur as historically important to the nation:

*Until yesterday afternoon it was a historic site, the heart of colonial heritage, a tourism icon.*<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> "Our Deepest Sympathy", in *The Mercury*, Monday, April 29, 1996, Hobart, p.9.

<sup>19</sup> Lamb, E. 1996, "Visitors Reclaim A Place of Beauty", in *The Mercury*, Monday, May 6, 1996, Hobart, p.2.

<sup>20</sup> "The Port Arthur Massacre", in *The Mercury*, April 29, 1996, Hobart, p.45.

*It couldn't happen. Not here. Not in Tasmania. An event so savage, tragic that our colonial past will forever live in its shadow.*<sup>21</sup>

The “heart of colonial heritage”? Could this incident be any worse than those that had occurred during our “colonial past”? These questions remain outside the discourse. The nation requires vigilance against incidents which threatened the structure of white Australian history and identity. It wasn't long before the media began to articulate the necessary discourses. Headlines suggested the way forward: “Today we gather to reclaim this place for the people, to reclaim it for peace”.<sup>22</sup> “Port Arthur Massacre Cafe To Go”.<sup>23</sup> The decision was made to “reclaim” the site by razing the cafe and building a memorial to the 35 people shot there. In this way, the site has become symbolic of the permanent hold on the landscape required by the Australian nation. The reinscribing of Port Arthur from convict prison to the tranquil “heart of colonial heritage” had to be maintained. It is a ritualistic process of taking possession of the landscape.

In this context, Hamish's burial in the Forbes Cemetery becomes an extension of maintaining national coherency. In a country which has physically threatened the life of the ‘real’ Australian and the coherency of the national identity, it seems appropriate to return the sacrifice to a piece of land which has been possessed and inscribed with the meaning of the nation. We, the family, still believe Hamish had come ‘home’. Publicly, the ‘bushman’ was returned to the soil and in doing so, claimed the land for our ancestors and the future. It is a process which creates a space in which to belong, a ritual which aims to “secure the land emotionally and spiritually for the settler society”,<sup>24</sup> and a ritual which continues to lay claim to the land we call Australia.

<sup>21</sup> “The Port Arthur Massacre”, in *The Mercury*, April 29, 1996, Hobart, p.46.

<sup>22</sup> “Today We Gather To Reclaim This Place For The People, To Reclaim It For Peace, To Reclaim It As A Place Of Safety and Play and Laughter”, in *The Mercury*, Saturday, May 4, 1996, p.96.

<sup>23</sup> “Port Arthur Massacre Cafe To Go”, in *The Mercury*, Friday, May 3, 1996, Hobart, p.2.

<sup>24</sup> Griffiths, T. 1996, *Hunters and Collectors*, p.151.

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While we were taking part in the process of inscribing the land, claiming this place as our own, another story was unfolding in Forbes. This story brought into sharp relief the claim we were making on this soil; Australian land, and revealed the uncertain fantasy for what it was.

*It was Dianne who opened my eyes to a different reality. Looking back it is easy to see that at the time I probably didn't realise the significance of the story she told. Growing up in a small, western NSW town, the real situation had remained hidden to me. I had never questioned why Forbes lacked the Aboriginal community of the surrounding regions. Dianne revealed that somehow the existing Aboriginal population disappeared early in the twentieth century. Where? No-one knows or will reveal. The local tribes were not pushed onto a mission or reserve like other regions. They just disappeared.<sup>25</sup> This left a long standing relief among the majority of the townsfolk that "we were not a boong-town". Something to be proud of and an opportunity to deny the problem and keep it from their minds.<sup>26</sup> There are many people in previous generations who believe that Aboriginal people never lived on that part of the Lachlan River. It is a story actively told and encouraged. It is also a lie. Aboriginal people remain wary of Forbes - the knowledge has passed from generation to generation in nearby regions. It is a bad place. It wasn't always. This story emphasises the reasons behind an understanding of Forbes as a 'bad place' within the Aboriginal community.<sup>27</sup>*

*Some years ago, an Aboriginal burial ground was discovered on a property outside Forbes. There are sand hills all along the Lachlan River which have resulted from silt build-up during flood times. These sandhills are places where*

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<sup>25</sup> The narrative of these events is drawn from interviews with Dianne Decker.

<sup>26</sup> The narrative of these events is drawn from interviews with Joyce Wallace and Margaret Genet.

<sup>27</sup> The narrative of these events is drawn from interviews with Dianne Decker.

*Aboriginal burial grounds can generally be found. This is due to the ground being softer than the hard-baked clay away from the river and would have been easier to inter bodies in.<sup>28</sup> These sandhills have been regularly mined for sand by farmers as an added source of income and this property was no exception. On an indeterminate day the sand was being mined and a subsequent load of sand was delivered to a building site in the Forbes township. Upon spreading the load, a builder discovered a skull and some bones which were identifiably human and seemed to be very old. The builder thought it was unimportant,...was unsure of what to do with them and placed the bones on a shelf in his shed and forgot about them. Some time later, the contractor mining sand unearthed a full skeleton in the bank of sand he was mining. There remains some discrepancy about times they were discovered and why the police were called. The police were told that the first lot of bones were forgotten about.<sup>29</sup> Outside the coronial inquiries, those connected will reluctantly tell a story of fear. Upon discovering the second skeleton all work ceased and what to do was debated. Despite all claims, I am certain that a majority, if not all, of property owners in western NSW have come across this kind of situation before; whether it be a burial ground or some kind of artefact. Most of the findings have gone unreported for fear of reprisals in the form of land rights and largely to deny the existence of the previous inhabitants of the land. In this case, leaving the skeleton undisturbed and 'forgetting' about it was the most preferred option. The skeleton was mostly intact and buried in the traditional manner. Also clear was the damage to the back of the skull which suggested darker possibilities. All agreed it was better left alone. Later that day something happened which served to change their minds. In this*

<sup>28</sup> See Clayton, I. & Barlow, A. 1997, *Wiradjuri Of The Rivers And Plains*, Heinemann Library Australia, Port Melbourne, and Rima, P. 1995, *Wiradjuri Places*, Black Mountain Projects, Jamison, for an evaluation of Wiradjuri mortuary practices. Unfortunately, the Aboriginal nations existing prior to European colonisation in NSW were not studied extensively before many cultural practices were lost. The understanding of Wiradjuri practices rests on isolated reports by explorers and settlers, along with more contemporary works which attempt to piece lifestyles together from widely disparate sources.

<sup>29</sup> Prior, Senior Constable M. S. 1992, Coronial Inquiry Report: Unident Bones E41706, Glebe Coroners Court, 13 February, 1992.

atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, an accident on a neighbouring property which resulted in the death of a child was seen as a message. Why, it is hard to say. My own speculation remains that these people were influenced by stories of bad Aboriginal spirits who punished Europeans. This is speculation on my part, for the fear has remained nameless and would have required my own suggestion to the teller of the story. Regardless of the name, there are countless inferences of power and the ways in which Aboriginal beliefs are protected. The fear remains that by unearthing the bones and the skeleton and not affording them the respect required of the dead, the power of ancient Aboriginal beliefs was unleashed, putting the landowners' lives in danger. To this end it is important to emphasise the nature of the burial. When the bones were examined by the police it was established that the second body found was that of a young girl. The damage to the back of the skull was consistent with either a blow from a blunt object or a bullet entering the back of the head. Subsequent coronial reports concluded that a twelve to fourteen year-old girl with a bullet hole in the back of her head was buried in a traditional manner some one hundred years ago. It could even be this century. The police involved "notified the National Parks and Wildlife Service of NSW and the Aboriginal Lands Board who indicated this find to be not rare in this region, with many listed Aboriginal massacre sites examined. ...In any case the great age of the remains dictates no further police interest."<sup>30</sup> The key word is massacre. Aboriginal spirits would certainly have taken an interest in this.

This kind of story resonates throughout Australia. Images of the land and its previous inhabitants as some kind of primitive life form with little-understood powers still hold credence. Their influence is remarkable. They are not restricted to people working with the land, nor to people who have no contact with the Aboriginal community. They are told in a hushed tone and people listen with wide eyes as they try to comprehend the power of the other. I myself have heard stories in surprising places that resonate with wonder that even I fall prey to.



*On a day in 1995 in a paddock on the Lachlan River outside Forbes, a group gathered. It was made up of an Aboriginal archaeologist, a member of the local Aboriginal community, a NSW National Parks and Wildlife Sites Officer and myself, an interested observer. We were there to witness the Aboriginal burial ground Dianne had told me about. Despite the findings of the bodies and the nature of their burials, the mining of sand has not ceased. The landowner did let us go there, however. He met us and we walked to the edge of paddock. We wandered the site. The archaeologist demonstrated the lines of cremation charcoal in the banks of the mined sand hill. The bodies were not there. They were reburied elsewhere according to the wishes of the local Aboriginal Lands Council. As we walked around, there were small bones scattering the surface as a result of a recent flood. It seemed sad and disrespectful to leave the dead unrecognised.*

*I stood on a rise in the paddock and marvelled at the blue sky and the way the view goes on forever where the trees in the distance have a gap and the flat, flat land meets the sky in a distant shimmer. In the eyes of the 'real' Australian it is paradise. A rural arcadia immortalised in innumerable artworks, writings and memoirs. I was surrounded by the evidence of rural success in Australia, that divine arcadia and felt burdened by the truth that it hides. I picked up a piece of bone washed loose from the soil. It was a finger bone and served to reinforce the reality of the loneliness and anonymity of the burial ground. All I could think was who were these people? What lives did they lead or share? My own understanding of the need for Hamish's interment in the Forbes Cemetery was clarified. I belonged there. So what of the people who had family in this burial ground? They had no access. Most likely no knowledge. And no place to remember the people who came before them - who lent weight to their sense of belonging and identity. Nowhere to call home.*

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<sup>30</sup> Prior, Senior Constable M. S. 1992, Report written at Forbes Police Station, 25 March 1992.

The notion of the cemetery as the focal point for cultural appropriation of land within rural Australia can be understood when we examine the issues surrounding colonisation and the existence of a prior culture. The land Europeans named Australia was not a landscape without meaning. It was not a mysterious wilderness. A culture existed within the landscape that the colonisers took for their own. In the early decades of the twentieth century, there remained a fascination with the bush, an ideal continuing from the 1890s. There also remained a fascination with the process of inscribing the land for the colonisers. Tom Griffiths argues that “[t]hey were drawing the land into their grasp with a net of meaning and ceremony, filling its spaces and defending its silences. They championed. . . a *white* indigenous culture, that denied, displaced. . . Aboriginal traditions.”<sup>31</sup> With this idea in mind, where in this story do Aboriginal traditions and cultural beliefs belong?

For the colonising Europeans, conquest over Australia was a necessary mark of their identity. Griffiths suggests that while “the land itself could not be ‘collected’,. . . it could be inscribed ritually and commemoratively”.<sup>32</sup> This process of ritually inscribing the land aimed to take not only physical, but ideological possession of the landscape. It was a process which required a reinterpretation of the previous Aboriginal culture. Discursively, this manifested in narratives by describing Australia as unoccupied. As Griffiths argues, “the destruction of Aboriginal culture underpinned much colonial history-making. . . most historical writings of this period reflect the belief that Aboriginal decline was inevitable and necessary”.<sup>33</sup> It was a process which effectively banished Aboriginal culture and its relation to the landscape from the historical structures of the colonising European society. Kay Schaffer argues a similar approach by suggesting that “[t]he battle for the land [and]

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<sup>31</sup> Griffiths, T. 1996, *Hunters and Collectors*, p.175.

<sup>32</sup> Griffiths, T. 1996, *Hunters and Collectors*, p.150.

<sup>33</sup> Griffiths, T. 1996, *Hunters and Collectors*, p.107. By “this period” Griffiths is referring to the end of the nineteenth century when Social Darwinism was gaining currency.

identity was fought in ideological terms . . . against the Aboriginal population”.<sup>34</sup> In this way, we can see how the cemetery has taken on the mantle of nationhood. This ‘place’ secures a “symbolic” and “civil” identity, displacing in the process the interests and identities of the Aboriginal population. The “place of the native inhabitant ..is disavowed on a white man’s mythical landscape of progressive survival”.<sup>35</sup> The Forbes Cemetery, therefore, becomes the mark of progressive survival against the bush. Once inside the gates of the cemetery we are surrounded by evidence of prosperity and European control of the landscape. My own impressions of the landscape reinforce this view. When I stand at my brother’s grave I view the surroundings with the pride of someone who believes they belong there. The perception of the hillside as a ‘tribute’ to the farmer suggests an awareness of the truth. I am amused by the attempt to create a green, ‘European’ cemetery that goes on in such an inhospitable environment. I am overshadowed by the presence of the town in the background. All of these perceptions, however, fail to record one thing. Who was here before?

I suggest that notions of ‘place’ or ‘identity’ emerge out of social and cultural constructions which establish identity through difference. It is only now as I recall the memories of that empty Aboriginal burial ground that I question my own position, my own desire. As I attempt to balance that desolate, vandalised paddock against my brothers green oasis in the Forbes Cemetery and the neat, ordered history of my family the realisation comes that I am connected to the national fantasy of the ‘bushman’. In my focus on inserting Hamish and my past into the Forbes Cemetery I have stumbled into upholding the national fantasy. It is my point of identification with Australia, acting as a means of consolidating my own culture and reinforcing the lie of white Australian history. In this way, the cemetery is symbolic of the way

<sup>34</sup> Schaffer, K. 1995, *In The Wake of First Contact: The Eliza Fraser Stories*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, p.65. [hereafter *In The Wake Of First Contact*].

<sup>35</sup> Schaffer, K. 1995, *In The Wake Of First Contact*, p.66.

national fantasies have provided a “frame for the enactment and consolidation of white culture at both the singular and collective level”.<sup>36</sup>

By denying the Aboriginal dead who have been inserted into the landscape we ultimately deprive their society of a future and an identity. The body of the Aboriginal girl found near Forbes symbolises the way, in order to maintain cultural coherency and for me to take part in an articulation of the ‘real’ Australian, she must remain absent from the story. Her presence is too dangerous, too confronting. She is my other and she must remain outside the story; absent. This conflict in my own intimate understanding of my place within the Australian nation remains insecure.

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<sup>36</sup> Rutherford, J. 1997, “‘Thursa, Turtle, Myrtle, Tortoise’: The Good Self Tells A Story. . .”, in *Meridian Literary Review*, No.2, 1997, La Trobe University Press, Melbourne, p.4.

## CONCLUSION

The construct of the 'Australian Legend' still exists as an identity within Australian society. It is apparent in many aspects of everyday life; restated in the discourses that pervade popular culture. The importance of maintaining a national identity lies not in the hands of historians who attempt to define it, but in the necessity of a coherent identity required for the existence of the 'nation'. By approaching the Australian nation as an artificial construct, a fantasy, we can gain an understanding of the power this one identity holds within contemporary Australian culture. It is an identity which comes to the subject through language and other forms of representation. These structures offer a discourse which can be restated at any time. Most importantly, at times when the structure of the nation is threatened, this restatement becomes a call for nationalism.

In the case of Hamish Wallace, his accident and resulting death offers an opportunity to evaluate the way modern ideas of nationalism rest on notions of immortality.<sup>1</sup> The nation is made immortal by being restated, intended to be preserved forever, "always ready to be dusted off, recovered, returned to the agenda of the current living; be confirmed as 'of importance' for that living".<sup>2</sup> By undertaking ritualised practices at the time of death, society contributes to the preservation and perpetuation of the group. In Australia, it is the 'Australian Legend' which is perpetuated. As Bauman suggests, the nation is hailed as the "supreme value, hovering above the short-lived, mortal lives of its members, only as long as it could be shown that it [is] exposed to a threat, in the face of which members had to huddle together to be sure of their survival".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bauman, Z. 1992, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*.

<sup>2</sup> Bauman, Z. 1992, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, p.170.

<sup>3</sup> Bauman, Z. 1992, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, p.106.



In the case of this accident, death and nature are the threats to the nation. A twentieth century understanding of death rests on fear - fear of the unknown, fear of loss of immortality. Death has become the other of modern life in such a way that the only understanding of death that contemporary Australian society has is through the medical profession, mediated by science providing answers against an unknown experience; and through discourses of war, where nature is the foe. Through an articulation of the ideal of the bushman, homogeneity is ensured; cohesion is encouraged; a united front is formed. The media did not simply record the experience, it became an opportunity to restate national myths. By portraying Hamish as the embodiment of the 'Australian Legend' who confronted the bush and was sacrificed in that ongoing war for the nation, his death was transformed into a cultural fantasy rather than a more ordinary encounter with human mortality. Fitzpatrick suggests that "the cultural myths that have developed around particular experiences of death serve to explain, eulogise and promote admiration and acceptance of the Australian struggle with life and death. The most succinct examples of these are the images of the explorers [who]. . . epitomise the struggle with the land. . . These images and experiences of death have caught the collective cultural imagination and elucidate the Australian experience in a way that differentiates it from other cultures".<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, Hamish's death offered an opportunity to ritually inscribe the land, distancing the threat of nature and an unknown landscape. By inserting Hamish's body in the Forbes Cemetery my past and future is seemingly coherent. By drawing the land "into a net of meaning and ceremony, filling its spaces and defending its silences",<sup>5</sup> Australian society displaces the other. Who is that other threatening the nation? The Aboriginal past. The cemetery has become an ideological battleground for the nation. Through possession of the landscape, the Aboriginal community is denied its past, its future and an identity. Selacl suggests that the true aim of the nation is "to destroy the way the enemy perceives itself, the way it forms its

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<sup>4</sup> Fitzpatrick, L. 1997, "Secular, Savage and Solitary", p.27.

<sup>5</sup> Griffiths, T. 1996, *Hunters and Collectors*, p.175.



identity”.<sup>6</sup> By denying an Aboriginal narration of the land we call Australia, the past inhabitants cease to exist. We force them to redefine their national myths. The aim is to destroy their fantasy structure and insert ours into that place.<sup>7</sup> Symbolically, the Aboriginal community is put to death, they are the threat to a coherent, national identity in Australia. We must be vigilant and protect the boundaries of the nation.

My own place remains insecure as I attempt to negotiate this death. Despite seeing the structure, I too am a part of it. In the words of Zygmunt Bauman: “identity can come to be and live only in a network of interactions; it can only be a collective achievement and shared operation”.<sup>8</sup> In attempting to remain part of the collective I have structured Hamish’s death such that I uphold the nation. Like Antigone, I was culturally bound by expectations of grief and mourning. I was desperate to bring my brother ‘home’ for burial. Why? The need to bury Hamish in the Forbes Cemetery arose from a need to belong. In this way we all take our place within the construct of the nation. Death continues to uphold the belief system and takes its place within the tropes of the Australian tradition. The ideals do not end with death. It is the last word in the maintenance of the nation.

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<sup>6</sup> Selacl, R. 1994, “The Fantasy Structure of War”, p.15.

<sup>7</sup> Selacl, R. 1994, “The Fantasy Structure of War”, pp.15-17.

<sup>8</sup> Bauman, Z. 1992, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, p.197.

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